

W. CARTHEN &
BOOKSELL
FELDMAN





THE RING AND THE BOOK
AS A CONNECTED NARRATIVE

THE BIBLE AND THE POPE
AS A CORRUPTED NARRATIVE

BROWNING'S RING AND THE BOOK AS A CONNECTED NARRATIVE

Compiled from the Poem

By

ALEXANDER HADDOW

BLACKIE AND SON LIMITED
50 OLD BAILEY, LONDON; GLASGOW, BOMBAY

1924

THE HISTORY OF
THE BOY
AS A COMEY
NARRATIVE

By the Rev. Mr. [illegible]

ALEXANDER WOOD

*Printed in Great Britain by
Blackie & Son, Limited, Glasgow*

PREFACE

Of all the long poems in the language it might be argued that *The Ring and the Book* ought to be the most popular. The plot is well worked out, the story is powerful and interesting, and leads to a crisis and to a final catastrophe worthy of a great tragedy, while the principal characters are clearly drawn, with a simplicity in their greatness which makes them easily understood. Yet such is the length of the poem that many are afraid to begin it, while to others the difficulty of Browning's method of telling the story is such that they lose interest before they reach the great books of the poem. How are these difficulties to be overcome?

One session, many years ago, when the Christmas examinations were finished and there was but a week to go to the vacation, I looked round for something in literature sufficiently interesting to hold my senior pupils even at that time, and decided to try them with one book of *The Ring and the Book*—*Giuseppe Caponsacchi*. We finished it in the week, and such

was its success that they formed a reading club to continue the study of the poem, and with them I read the whole of *The Ring and the Book*—21,134 lines.

That these pupils were capable of appreciating the poem was demonstrated beyond all question. This it was which led me to attempt to do for other readers what I had had the opportunity of doing for them.

It is a pleasure to acknowledge the help and encouragement I have received from many friends. Among these I am especially indebted to Mrs. Stewart, my former colleague in Hillhead High School, and to Mr. D. MacGillivray, headmaster of the school; to Mr. Wm. Robb, H.M.C.I.S. for Lanarkshire; and to Mr. Alastair Campbell and Mr. James Fyfe, who read and corrected the proofs with me and helped me through this difficult part of the work.

To these and all others I desire to render my sincere thanks.

ALEXANDER HADDOW.

INTRODUCTION

One day in June, 1860, Browning, led, as he himself tells us, by Providence, crossed one of the busy squares in Florence which was then his home. He noticed among other objects displayed for sale on the steps of a palace a "square old yellow book". He "gave a *lira* for it, eightpence English just". The title-page of the book he translates literally thus:

A Roman murder-case:
Position of the entire criminal cause
Of Guido Franceschini, nobleman,
With certain Four the cutthroats in his pay,
Tried, all five, and found guilty and put to death
By heading or hanging as befitted ranks,
At Rome on February Twenty-two,
Since our salvation Sixteen Ninety-eight:
Wherein it is disputed if, and when,
Husbands may kill adulterous wives, yet 'scape
The customary forfeit.

The book consisted of the actual legal documents relating to the trial. At that time the lawyers wrote out their speeches, which were then printed and laid before the court. These documents had been gathered together and bound by some lawyer interested in the case. In this form they had been preserved for over

one hundred and sixty years till they fell into Browning's hands.

To explain his method of using this material he gives the following illustration, which explains also the name of the poem: *The Ring and the Book*. He points to a little ring of pure gold beautifully worked. The pure gold, he tells us, is in itself too soft to bear the hammer and the file, and so the craftsmen first melt it down and mix with it an alloy. They then make the ring and work on it the artistic device they wish. When this is finished they sprinkle an acid over it which burns out the alloy and leaves the pure gold ring with its added beauty. This is the method Browning adopts with the *Old Yellow Book*. In it, he tells us, lies "pure crude fact". But what has become of it all these years? Guido, Pompilia, and Caponsacchi are forgotten, the meaning of their lives lost to the world. How then is he to bring it to bear on the world? As the craftsmen had mixed the gold with an alloy, so he mixes the crude fact with the living force of his imagination, breathes into those dead actors his own living energy, and makes them act once again on the world's stage the drama of their life. But, when the actors have all spoken, and have each told the tale of the crime in his own way, Browning steps back and leaves the final act to the reader. As the acid burned out the alloy in the worked gold, so it is left to the reader's criticism to try and test the complex material before him and reject whatever he finds false.

The poem is divided into twelve books.

Book I, *The Ring and the Book*. This is the introductory book from which we get the above information,

and also a statement of the facts of the trial of Count Guido Franceschini for the murder of his wife Pompilia.

Book II, *Half-Rome*, in which we get the story as it appears to those of the Roman populace who favour Guido.

Book III, *The Other Half-Rome*, in which we get the story as it appears to those of the Roman populace who favour Pompilia.

Book IV, *Tertium Quid*, in which a man of society, supposed to be above the prejudices of the crowd, tells the story as it appears to the would-be unbiased "finer sense o' the city".

Book V, *Count Guido Franceschini*, in which Guido, who has been tortured to make him confess, defends and justifies his act.

Book VI, *Giuseppe Caponsacchi*, in which the hero defends and justifies Pompilia.

Book VII, *Pompilia*, in which Pompilia on her deathbed tells the story of her life.

Book VIII, *Dominus Hyacinthus de Archangelis*, in which the "procurator of the Poor" puts the case for Guido.

Book IX, *Juris Doctor Johannes-Baptista Bottinius*, in which the "Fisc" puts the case for Pompilia.

Book X, *The Pope*, in which the Pope sums up, and condemns Guido.

Book XI, *Guido*, in which Guido, the last night of his life, gives us his real view of the case.

Book XII, *The Book and the Ring*, in which Browning tells of the execution of Guido and his confederates, and adds the few other facts he has discovered about the actors.

From the above it can be seen that the story is told ten times over from ten different points of view. In no case is the whole story told. To get this we must read them all. As we would expect from the method which Browning has adopted, the poem is very long. It is twice the length of *Paradise Lost*, a little over twenty-one thousand lines. The method, however, is completely justified by its success. In support of this statement, I cannot do better than quote the words of Professor Hodell, who has translated the "Old Yellow Book" into English and so has enabled us to compare Browning's material with his finished work. In his introduction to the "Everyman's Library" edition of the Old Yellow Book he says: "The Old Yellow Book is a soiled and bloody page from the criminal annals of Rome two centuries ago, saved apparently by mere chance for the one great artist of modern literature who could best use it, and who has raised this record of a forgotten crime to a permanent place in that ideal world of man's creation where Caponsacchi and Pompilia have joined the company of Paolo and Francesca, of the Red Cross Knight, of Imogen, of Marguerite and Faust, and of Don Quixote".

I have attempted in this book to tell the whole story as shortly as possible, using, wherever I could, Browning's own words. My aim is to enable the reader, who lacks either time or patience to read the whole poem, to go at once to the four great books, *Giuseppe Caponsacchi*, *Pompilia*, *The Pope*, and *Guido*, and yet lose nothing in his appreciation of them through his ignorance of the other books.

THE RING AND THE BOOK

I

On the morning of Friday, the 3rd of January, 1698, the bodies of two old people, murdered the night before by Count Guido Franceschini and four of his servants, were laid out to view in the chancel of the Church San Lorenzo in Lucina; and "since all the world knew the old pair" and "could talk the tragedy over from first to last", the church was thronged with people "coming and going" from morning till evening. All Rome seemed to be there. The "People climbed up the columns", and "fought for spikes o' the chapel-rail to perch themselves upon". . . . "The organ-loft was crammed, women were fainting, no few fights ensued", while all who could pushed their way eagerly towards the altar, "saw, threw their eyes up, crossed themselves, gave place to pressure from behind". There the bodies lay, each surrounded by a ring of burning tapers, "and one big taper at each head and foot", Pietro Comparini to the right of the altar and his wife Violante to the left. The bodies were covered with ragged-looking dagger wounds, the face of the woman particularly being mutilated almost beyond recognition, so that the people

could hardly tell "which is eye and which is mouth thro' those stabs thick and threefold".

In explanation of this the first speaker declares, with the callousness which marks him, that the gallants of the time, when they avenged their honour, considered it a delicacy to

disfigure the subject, fray the face,
Not just take life and end, in clownish guise.
It was Violante gave the first offence,
Got therefore the conspicuous punishment:
While Pietro, who helped merely, his mere death
Answered the purpose, so his face went free.¹

Or as he put it again:

His wounds had been dealt out indifferent where,
But she took all her stabbings in the face,
Since punished thus solely for honour's sake.²

At their feet lay one of the weapons which had "caused the peculiar cuts", a Genoese dagger with triangular blade and "little hook-teeth on the edge to open in the flesh nor shut again", chosen to glut the malice of Guido that he might "murder with jagged knife, cut but tear too". And from Reni's great picture over the altar the Crucified Christ looks down and sees but this "after the passion of a thousand years". To this altar seventeen years before Pietro had brought the babe Pompilia, whom he thought his daughter, "for blessing after baptism"; to this altar twelve years later Violante had brought Pompilia to be secretly married to Count Guido Franceschini; to this altar were they both brought this morning and laid out upon the steps; and to this same altar a few days hence will Pompilia be brought for the last time. For she who had but two weeks before given birth to her first child, Gaetano, had been seized by her husband in the house of

¹ H.R. 32-7.

² H.R. 26-8.

the Comparini and left for dead with "twenty-two dagger wounds, five deadly", and now she lies dying in the little hospital of St. Anna's while the people throng without and watch every opening of the gate. The visitors come and go, the lawyers to hear her statement of the case, the priests to shrive her, and many old friends who force their way in to see her for the last time. With that natural reverence for those who have suffered greatly, the people are already beginning to regard her as a saint, if we may judge from the tale of old Monna Baldi, whose palsied limb began to "prick and promise life at touch o' the bedclothes merely". Carlo Maratto also, the painter, has gained admission and is hard at work painting that beautiful saint-like face, with its "flashing brow" and "dark orbs deep underneath" and its crown of glorious black pendent hair. "I do not suffer much or too much pain", she says, with that sweet gentle patience, that calm fortitude which defied and conquered even the hate and cruelty of Guido. As she tells her story, her spotless purity and childlike innocence, her deep motherly love and tenderness for her babe, the womanly sweetness of her nature which leads her to find excuse even for her murderer,

So he was made; he nowise made himself:
I could not love him, but his mother did;¹

her invincible faith in God and indomitable spirit of quiet endurance, and power of rising at the moment of need above all womanly fear, her terrible sufferings and coming death, move her hearers to tears as they cluster round her bed. The strange beauty of her love for Caponsacchi reminds us of Shelley's lines,

The devotion to something afar
From the sphere of our sorrows.

¹ P. 1731-2.

But the purity of her devotion to him whom she considers as separated from her by God Himself, her complete satisfaction that all is well and has been well, and her trust that in a future world he will be there to guide and guard her, this it is which appeals most directly to the hearts of her hearers. "Physician and man of law" alike weep; even Celestino, the confessor of the hospital, whose ears have heard many a tale of cruelty and outrage, even he breaks down and groans "no question she was pure from first to last", while Pompilia, accustomed to the cold hard cruelty of the world, wonders only at the brotherly kindness and tenderness of her hearers. And her murderer, Guido the astute, whose plans were laid so cunningly, and who by one small oversight has ruined all, he with his four confederates lies in the New Prison and will lie there for some seven weeks, till his case is tried and he is condemned. In Civita meanwhile, in the monastery the brave and noble young priest Giuseppe Maria Caponsacchi, the hero of the story, unaware of what has happened, is leading the life of a relegated priest, and brooding, we need not doubt, over the mystery of human life and love. Some two or three days hence he will learn the terrible news and set out for Rome. By his help Pompilia had escaped from Guido's clutches eight months before, and now again he comes, not this time to rescue her body, but her name from dishonour, and bring down on Guido the death he has so fully earned.

These are the main actors in the story of *The Ring and the Book*.

II

In the year 1679 there lived in Rome Pietro and Violante Comparini, man and wife, and fifty-two years of age. They had married early and had no children, and belonged to "the modest middle class" though "wealthier than the majority". With neither the cares of wealth nor the fears of poverty, neither envying the happiness of others nor yet the object of much envy, they had lived a life of easy self-indulgence. In character too they suited each other well; Pietro, "the good fat rosy careless man, acquiescent and recipient" by nature, and Violante, "the stirring striving one", more active and enterprising;

So again, in the couple's very souls
You saw the adequate half with half to match,
Each having and each lacking somewhat.¹

Pietro owned two houses, one "in Via Vittoria the aspectable street, where he lived mainly", and one "of less pretension" in a more obscure situation in the Pauline district which he used for "jaunts and jollity to be private there". One source of their wealth lay in the fact that Pietro was, "as the long name runs, an usufructuary", drawing each year the interest on a sum of money, which sum, however, he could not touch. The interest was "his till death" and would then pass to the next heir. This more than anything else had brought home to them their childlessness and formed a continual "reminder of the

¹ O.H.R. 127-9.

One of those women that abound in Rome,
Whose needs oblige them eke out one poor trade
By another vile one.¹

One night Violante sets off apparently for vespers, but,
passing the church of San Lorenzo by,

Dives down a little lane to the left, is lost
In a labyrinth of dwellings best unnamed,
Selects a certain blind one, black at base,
Blinking at top,—the sign of we know what,—
One candle in a casement set to wink
Streetward, do service to no shrine inside,—
Mounts thither by the filthy flight of stairs,
Holding the cord by the wall, to the tip-top,
Gropes for the door i' the dark, ajar of course,
Raps, opens, enters in.²

There in a miserable garret she finds this woman, the
future mother of Pompilia, who greets her with astonish-
ment, her visitors being generally of a very different kind.
To her Violante proposes a bargain, offering to buy from
her the child she will bear, if she will hand it over as soon
as it is born to the person she sends.

Five minutes' talk with this poor child of Eve,
Struck was the bargain, business at an end—
“ Then, six months hence, that person whom you trust,
“ Comes, fetches whatsoever babe it be;
“ I keep the price and secret, you the babe,
“ Paying beside for mass to make all straight.”³

Violante goes home triumphant, tells her husband that
her prayers have been heard, that she will probably soon
bear a child, and meanwhile must not be crossed in any
whim. Pietro, “ enraptured much but puzzled more ” at
the news, and in his easy way never questioning the truth
of his wife's statement nor doubting its likelihood in spite
of her age, gives her her way. And six months afterwards

¹ *T.Q.* 166-8.

² *T.Q.* 149-58.

³ *T.Q.* 185-90.

he is presented with a little baby girl whom he at once gets baptized by the name Francesca Camilla Vittoria Angela Pompilia Comparini and takes afterwards to the Church San Lorenzo in Lucina "for blessing after baptism". Thus was Pompilia born "The illicit offspring of a common trull" and an unknown father, and the reputed daughter of Pietro and Violante Comparini. The advent of Pompilia had the desired effect. "Wrapped up in the love of" his child and recognizing that he would now have new uses for his money and that he must save for her dowry, Pietro at once changed his mode of life.

Cuppings, carousings,—these a sponge wiped out.
All sort of self-denial was easy now
For the child's sake,

And so, the debts were paid, habits reformed,
Expense curtailed, the dowry set to grow.¹

The knowledge of her sin seemed to drive Violante to "exemplary penance". She became a model of motherly love and neighbourly kindness.

"Twas a text
Whereon folk preached and praised, the district through:
It all comes of God giving her a child.²

Pompilia was born about the middle of July, 1679, and for thirteen years lived a happy, innocent child's life, "never a mile from mother's house" and "each day happy as the day was long".

Leap over a dozen years: you find, these past,
An old good easy creditable sire,
A careful housewife's beaming bustling face,
Both wrapped up in the love of their one child,
The strange tall pale beautiful creature grown
Lily-like out o' the cleft i' the sun-smit rock.³

¹ T.Q. 293-8.

² T. Q. 300-3.

³ T.Q. 318-23.

Her education consisted of a little music and embroidery. She could neither read nor write. We hear but little about her childhood, but what we do hear is characteristic of the Pompilia of our story. Take, for example:

The poor virgin that I used to know
At our street-corner in a lonely niche,—
The babe, that sat upon her knees, broke off,—
Thin white glazed clay, you pitied her the more:
She, not the gay ones, always got my rose.¹

And now Count Guido Franceschini enters into her life apparently to ruin it, but in his hate and cruelty succeeding only in making manifest to the world

The snow-white soul that angels fear to take
Untenderly.²

¹ *P.* 77-81.

² *G.G.* 195-6.

III

Guido Franceschini was the head
Of an old family in Arezzo, old
To that degree they could afford be poor
Better than most.¹

As he says himself:

I am representative of a great line,
One of the first of the old families
In Arezzo, ancientest of Tuscan towns,²

and "descend from Guido once Homager to the Empire".

The family had grown poor, and Guido's father, apparently an easy-going spendthrift, had left them almost destitute. Their

dilapidated palace-shell
Vast as a quarry and, very like, as bare,³

represented well the pride and poverty of the Franceschini. Guido thus describes their condition as it was in his youth:

It made me reason, rather—muse, demand
—Why our bare dropping palace . . .
. . . could hardly show a turret sound?
Why Countess Beatrice, whose son I am,
Covered in the winter-time as she spun flax,
Blew on the earthen basket of live ash,
Instead of jaunting forth in coach and six
Like such-another widow who ne'er was wed?⁴

¹ *T.Q.* 355-8.

² *C.G.F.* 140-2.

³ *O.H.R.* 306-7.

⁴ *C.G.F.* 183-92.

When Guido was fifteen, the Franceschini sold one of their fields to raise some ready money, and he set off for Rome to attempt to retrieve the fortunes of his family, as he would have us believe. "Being the head o' the house, ordained to wive" he could not enter the Church, but he aimed at making his fortune by her aid. He became, therefore, gentleman-servant to a Cardinal, and in addition entered as it were the outer pale of the Church, assuming, however, only such orders as would leave him still the freedom of a layman and yet enable him in difficulties to claim "the clerkly privilege" and have his case referred from the law to the Pope. To put it in his own words, which partly reveal the character of the man:

Close to the church, though clean of it, I assumed
Three or four orders of no consequence,
—They cast out evil spirits and exorcise,
For example; bind a man to nothing more,
Give clerical savour to his layman's-salt,
Facilitate his claim to loaf and fish.¹

In addition, he led the life of the young gallants of the time, "rode, danced and gamed", "measured mine with whatsoever blade had fame in fence". Thus he lived hoping for the piece of luck which seemed sure to come, and thus he waited thirty years, seeing in the meanwhile many a man of inferior rank "but readier hand and eye" pass him in the race for fortune. We hear little of this part of his life, but we get an idea of it from the words of the speaker in *Half-Rome*. It should be remembered that this speaker is one of Guido's supporters, that in his speech he endeavours to justify the murder of Pompilia. He says, however:

The Count had lounged somewhat too long in Rome,
Made himself cheap; with him were hand and glove
Barbers and blear-eyed.²

¹ C.G.F. 269-74.

² H.R. 113-5.

Thus at the age of forty-six we find him

poor, care-bitten, sorrow-sunk,
Little, long-nosed, bush-bearded, lantern-jawed.¹

Finally we are led to believe that "the Cardinal saw fit to dispense with him", and Guido is cast adrift with no further hope of advance from the Church. In Arezzo he had boasted often of the preferment to come, and now, "after the bragging bullying", he finds himself stranded. In this difficulty his younger brother comes to his assistance. Paolo Franceschini had entered the Church and prospered and had hopes of prospering further. From the beginning he

Played the regular game,—priest and Abate,
Made friends, owned house and land, became of use
To a personage: his course lay clear enough.²

From one point of view he seems even more repulsive than Guido. He is "smooth-mannered, soft-speeched, sleek-cheeked", "fox-faced", "with mischief-making mouth and eye". In his final summing up the Pope thus describes him:

This fox-faced horrible priest, this brother-brute
The Abate,—why, mere wolfishness looks well,
Guido stands honest in the red o' the flame,
Beside this yellow that would pass for white,
Twice Guido, all craft but no violence,
This copier of the mien and gait and garb
Of Peter and Paul, that he may go disguised,
Rob halt and lame, sick folk i' the temple-porch!³

Paolo, or Paul, as he is frequently called, sees at once that Guido's one chance of retrieving his fortunes lies in marriage, and we can form a fair estimate of his character from his going at once for advice to one whom he con-

¹ *T.Q.* 717-8.

² *T.Q.* 393-5.

³ *Pope*, 880-7.

siders "an oracle", "a sleek young-old barberess", a "woman-dealer in perukes", whom he and some others had "settled in the shop at Place Colonna". He puts the case before her and asks:

"Whom do you suggest
"As properest party in the quarter round
"For the Count here?—he is minded to take wife."¹

She at once suggests Pompilia and describes to them "the household and its ways", "the easy husband and the shrewder wife", adding regarding Pompilia's dowry that she "would have so much for certain and so much more in likelihood". This exactly suits the brothers. Paul at once sets off to visit the Comparini, determined to lay the case before Violante and to appeal to her vanity. By craft or good luck he gets her alone, and here he skilfully puts into play all his dignity as a churchman and the descendant of a noble house to overawe and dazzle the simple woman.

So—giving now his great flap-hat a gloss
With flat o' the hand between-whiles, soothing now
The silk from out its creases o'er the calf,
Setting the stocking clerical again,
But never disengaging, once engaged,
The thin clear grey hold of his eyes on her—²

he told her of "that Tuscan house" to which he and Guido belonged, how old the family of the Franceschini were, though not rich, at least certainly not what the rising bourgeois would call rich; by this, however, he did not mean poor either, "Say rather well enough—i' the way indeed to fortune", since he had high hopes of wearing the red one day; but Guido his brother was getting old and restless and would no longer wait patiently, was homesick in short; the fact was, he was wanting in ambi-

¹ *T.Q.* 444-6.

² *O.H.R.* 264-9.

tion, was longing to get back to Arezzo to his home and the old familiar sights and faces; yes! his brother "pined amid Rome's pomp and glare" for his old dingy palace in Arezzo and

that absurd wild villa in the waste
O' the hillside, breezy though, for who likes air,
Vittiano, nor unpleasant with its vines,
Outside the city and the summer heats,¹

and so was determined to marry and go home to cheer the life of his old mother. For his own part he thought that his brother was quite right; for, since "there was no making Guido great spite of himself", why then should he not aim at happiness? But here he had indeed to fear the guileless simplicity of his elder brother, for if he left him to look out for a wife for himself he would certainly be imposed upon; there were plenty of women in Rome, as she well knew, on the look out for such a match; true, their house was no longer so great as it was in the old days of the Crusades when "we sent eagles forth", but still he could not bear to see their ancient blood contaminated, and so, as "Priesthood leaps over elder brothership", he had divined his brother's purpose and taken it upon himself to guide him; he "knew what he purposed better than himself" and so would speak for both; they were not seeking for a woman of high rank, Guido himself being noble enough, nor yet for wealth, that being the last thing in their thoughts, but "some good girl", "tender and true", whose heart was "prepared to pant in time and tune with ours"; a girl she must be,

(since she must take
The new bent, live new life, adopt new modes)
Not wealthy (Guido for his rank was poor)
But with whatever dowry came to hand,—²

¹ O.H.R. 309-12.

² O.H.R. 353-6.

such was the wife they sought, and somehow he had heard that in this very house there lived such a one, a

Lily of a maiden, white with intact leaf,

A wife worth Guido's house and hand and heart?

He came to see; had spoken, he could no less—

(A final cherish of the stockinged calf)

If harm were,—well, the matter was off his mind.”¹

This story did Paolo tell to Violante.

Then with the great air did he kiss, devout,
Violante's hand, and rise up his whole height

(A certain purple gleam about the black)

And go forth grandly,—as if the Pope came next.²

Poor Violante, bewildered and wondering whether she is asleep or awake, promptly lays the whole matter before her husband. Pietro, equally bewildered, sets out “dignifiedly” to ask his friends “for form's sake” who Count Guido Franceschini may be and receive their congratulations on the honour about to come to his house. He is soon undeceived. All know Guido, know that he is a count indeed, but know also his utter poverty, “sloth, pride, rapacity”. They point out at once that only his poverty could have forced him to stoop to such a marriage, that he aims not at Pompilia but her dowry. And so, after giving him Guido's history and character and some information also concerning Paolo, they tell him to make his girl a lady if he likes but not to attempt to brag to them of his bargain. Having thus been well laughed at, the simple Pietro returns home, informs Violante of the real state of affairs and that the marriage must not be gone on with, and she seems to acquiesce at once in his decision. But something more powerful even than vanity was urging

¹ O.H.R. 365-72.

² O.H.R. 373-6.

her towards the marriage. She knew how precarious was the position of Pompilia, and thought that if the facts concerning her birth should ever be discovered it would ruin her chance of happiness in this life. Violante's one desire was to see her safely married, beyond the reach of danger. Thus when Paolo told his story, "instead of piercing straight through the pretence to the ignoble truth", she "fancied she saw God's very finger point" how she might once for all make Pompilia safe for life, give her a husband and one able to raise her above all fear for the future; and so, even after Pietro has told her what he has learned concerning Guido, the idea still persists that this is the one chance for Pompilia. But for her sin that ever "kept pricking at her heart" her natural shrewdness would have saved her. Blinded thus, she takes the step that leads them all to their doom. She makes arrangements with Paolo to have the marriage performed secretly, trusting to be able to persuade her husband afterwards. Pompilia, the pure, beautiful girl of twelve, ignorant as a child of the affairs of this world,

Was told one morning that her fate had come,
She must be married—just as, a month before,
Her mother told her she must comb her hair
And twist her curls into one knot behind.¹

Her mother said that the cavalier who would come next morning, and whom she must allow to kiss her hand would be at San Lorenzo the same evening and then would marry her, and that after the marriage they would come home without him, as before; meanwhile, however she must not speak of the subject until her mother bade her,

Such being the correct way with girl-brides,
From whom one word would make a father blush.²

¹ *T.Q.* 671-4.

² *P.* 383-4.

Pompilia's childlike simplicity is shown in her own words:

I know, I say, that when she told me this,
—Well, I no more saw sense in what she said
Than a lamb does in people clipping wool;
Only lay down and let myself be clipped.¹

Her idea of a cavalier was drawn from a picture in the tapestry of a "slim young man with wings at head and wings at feet" rescuing a girl from a monster. But when the cavalier who came the next morning proved to be

Guido Franceschini,—old
And nothing like so tall as I myself,
Hook-nosed and yellow in a bush of beard,
Much like a thing I saw on a boy's wrist,
He called an owl and used for catching birds,—
And when he took my hand and made a smile—
Why, the uncomfortableness of it all
Seemed hardly more important,²

than whether the coin she got to spend was bright or dirty. The coin in each case brought in return the same quantity of grapes and figs:

So, hardly knowing what a husband meant,
I supposed this or any man would serve,
No whit the worse for being so uncouth.³

One gets from these quotations some idea of the simple purity of Pompilia. She who in the next four years was to walk in the kingdoms of all our "Three Ladies of Sorrow" and learn "Elder truths, sad truths, grand truths, fearful truths"; she who in Guido's terrible house was to see so much of the sorrow and the shame and the suffering of this world, but who also was to see in Caponsacchi to what heights the human spirit can rise, was yet

¹ P. 385-8.

² P. 394-401.

³ P. 410-2.

but a simple, happy girl. Her description of the marriage ceremony is so simple, direct, and effective, and at the same time so ominous of the terrible future in store for the poor girl-bride, that it is given entirely in her own words:

However, I was hurried through a storm,
Next dark eve of December's dearest day—
How it rained!—through our street and the Lion's-mouth
And the bit of Corso,—cloaked round, covered close,
I was like something strange or contraband,—
Into blank San Lorenzo, up the aisle,
My mother keeping hold of me so tight,
I fancied we were come to see a corpse
Before the altar which she pulled me toward.
There we found waiting an unpleasant priest
Who proved the brother, not our parish friend,
But one with mischief-making mouth and eye,
Paul, whom I know since to my cost. And then
I heard the heavy church-door lock out help
Behind us: for the customary warmth,
Two tapers shivered on the altar. "Quick—
"Lose no time!" cried the priest. And straightway down
From . . . what's behind the altar where he hid—
Hawk-nose and yellowness and bush and all,
Stepped Guido, caught my hand, and there was I
O' the chancel, and the priest had opened book,
Read here and there, made me say that and this,
And after, told me I was now a wife,
Honoured indeed, since Christ thus weds the Church,
And therefore turned he water into wine,
To show I should obey my spouse like Christ.
Then the two slipped aside and talked apart,
And I, silent and scared, got down again
And joined my mother who was weeping now.
Nobody seemed to mind us any more,
And both of us on tiptoe found our way
To the door which was unlocked by this, and wide.
When we were in the street, the rain had stopped,
All things looked better. At our own house-door,
Violante whispered "No one syllable
"To Pietro! Girl-brides never breathe a word!"¹

¹ P. 425-60.

Pietro laughed at them returning so wet, and Pompilia was about to reply to his questions, when

Violante gave my hand a timely squeeze,
Madonna saved me from immodest speech,
I kissed him and was quiet, being a bride.¹

But how did Guido regard this marriage? Needless to say, to so selfish a nature as his, it appeared in a very different light. In his speech in prison the night before his execution he describes how he first saw Pompilia, "the thirteen-years' old child, with milk for blood", in her home in Via Vittoria:

Her so-called mother,—one arm round the waist
O' the child to keep her from the toys, let fall
At wonder I can live yet look so grim,—
Ushers her in, with deprecating wave
Of the other,—and she fronts me loose at last,
Held only by the mother's finger-tip.
Struck dumb,—for she was white enough before!—
She eyes me with those frightened balls of black,
As heifer—the old simile comes pat—
Eyes tremblingly the altar and the priest.
The amazed look, all one insuppressive prayer,—
Might she but breathe, set free as heretofore,
Have this cup leave her lips unblistered, bear
Any cross anywhither anyhow,
So but alone, so but apart from me!²

It is true that he desired nothing but the dowry, but to obtain it he had to stoop to the marriage, and because of this he hated and despised the old couple whose wealth he sought, while Pompilia's frank, unspoken criticism of his appearance wounds his pride and in his heart he hates her for it.

Therefore 't is she begins with wronging me
Who cannot but begin with hating her.³

¹ P. 469-71.

² G. 970-84.

³ G. 1032-3.

Violante tries to soothe him and smooth over matters, but he is not to be blinded:

Deceive yourself one minute, if you may,
In presence of the child that so loves age,
Whose neck writhes, cords itself against your kiss,
Whose hand you wring stark, rigid with despair!¹

He describes the marriage, how

Just as bid, she bears herself,
Comes and kneels, rises, speaks, is silent,—goes.

When the mother speaks the word,
She obeys it—even to enduring me!²

This very obedience, even though by it he gains his end, but rouses Guido's anger, as it gives him no opportunity of venting his hate. He would have preferred rebellion;

There had been compensation in revolt—
Revolt's to quell: but martyrdom rehearsed,
But predetermined saintship for the sake
O' the mother?—"Go!" thought I, "we meet again!"³

As Pompilia saw no more of Guido for some time, she thought in her simple way that she had seen the last of him. She remembered that she had been cured of an illness by a peculiarly ugly doctor, and had never seen him again, and so she concluded:

just as I was cured,
I am married,—neither scarecrow will return.⁴

Some three weeks later as she sat one morning singing at her embroidery, thinking how astonished her girl friends would be did they know she was married, suddenly she heard "loud voices, two, three together, sobbings too",

¹ G. 1018-21.

² G. 1043-51.

³ G. 1052-5.

⁴ P. 477-8.

and her own name and those of Guido and Paolo “flung like stones from each to the other”. She ran into the room—

There stood the very Guido and the priest
With sly face,—formal but nowise afraid,—
While Pietro seemed all red and angry, scarce
Able to stutter out his wrath in words;
And this it was that made my mother sob,
As he reproached her—“ You have murdered us,
“ Me and yourself and this our child beside!”
Then Guido interposed “ Murdered or not,
“ Be it enough your child is now my wife!
“ I claim and come to take her.”¹

Here Paul interposes, guarantees that Guido and Pompilia are man and wife, and adds that Pietro will best show his wisdom by endeavouring to predispose the bridegroom in the bride’s favour, lest he “begin marriage an embittered man ”.

He smiled,—the game so wholly in his hands!
While fast and faster sobbed Violante—“ Ay,
“ All of us murdered, past averting now!
“ O my sin, O my secret!” and such like.²

While Pompilia stands wondering, hearing all speak of her though none address her, and dimly surmising that her mother is guilty of some underhand transaction in which she has been sold like a chattel:

Pietro cried “ Withdraw, my child!
“ She is not helpful to the sacrifice
“ At this stage,—do you want the victim by
“ While you discuss the value of her blood?
“ For her sake, I consent to hear you talk:
“ Go, child, and pray God help the innocent!”
I did go and was praying God, when came
Violante, with eyes swollen and red enough,
But movement on her mouth for make-believe
Matters were somehow getting right again.³

¹ P. 487-96.

² P. 512-5.

³ P. 522-31.

She tells Pompilia that all is well, that her father sees now that the marriage was right, which

“ Gives you a husband and a noble name,
“ A palace and no end of pleasant things;”¹

that they are not to be separated, but are all going to live together at Arezzo,

“ In a great palace where you will be queen,
“ Know the Archbishop and the Governor,
“ And we see homage done you ere we die.”²

She finished with the words: “ Therefore, be good and pardon ”. Pompilia’s answer is characteristic:

“ Pardon what?
“ You know things, I am very ignorant:
“ All is right if you only will not cry!”³

Here ends Pompilia’s happy childhood. She will not again taste of happiness until she has drained to the dregs the cup of human suffering, and then no longer as a girl, but as a woman matured and purified by sorrow, she will for a little know happiness in two of its most divine forms. She herself tells us on her deathbed, how all the sorrow and suffering are as nothing compared with her joy in the birth of her child, and we see in her love for Caponsacchi what love can mean to a woman. It lifts her at once above all fear and suffering and shows her what life on earth might be, while her faith that in another world he will be there to guide and guard her,

My weak hand in thy strong hand, strong for that”⁴

makes death itself but the gate of Heaven. But the happiness of childhood is gone for ever.

¹ P. 553-4.

² P. 568-70.

³ P. 571-3.

⁴ P. 1790.

And so an end! Because a blank begins
From when, at the word, she kissed me hard and hot,
And took me back to where my father leaned
Opposite Guido—who stood eyeing him,
As eyes the butcher the cast panting ox
That feels his fate is come, nor struggles more,—
While Paul looked archly on, pricked brow at whiles
With the pen-point as to punish triumph there,—
And said “Count Guido, take your lawful wife
“Until death part you!”¹

The marriage articles regarding Pompilia’s dowry were drawn up and were supervised by the Cardinal himself whom Guido had served so long. “The parents cast their lot into the lap o’ the daughter.” By this Guido gained not only his wife’s dowry, but their whole property even to the interest on the usufruct, the principal of which would be his at Pietro’s death. And so they left Rome for Arezzo. Once there the storm burst. By rank Guido was one of the first in Arezzo, a friend of the Governor and the Archbishop. This assured him against outside interference. Within his bare old dingy palace he was lord and master. His first aim was to get rid of Pietro and Violante. His hatred of them is well shown in the following extract from his last speech.

That mother with her cunning and her cant—
The eyes with first their twinkle of conceit,
Then, dropped to earth in mock-demureness,—now,
The smile self-satisfied from ear to ear,
Now, the prim pursed-up mouth’s protruded lips,
With deferential duck, slow swing of head,
Tempting the sudden fist of man too much,—
That owl-like screw of lid and rock of ruff!
As for the father,—Cardinal, you know,
The kind of idiot!—such are rife in Rome,
But they wear velvet commonly; good fools,

¹ P. 574-83.

At the end of life, to furnish forth young folk
Who grin and bear with imbecility:

. Have you stooped
For your own ends to bestialize yourself
By flattery of a fellow of this stamp?
The ends obtained or else shown out of reach,
He goes on, takes the flattery for pure truth,—
“ You love, and honour me, of course: what next?”
What, but the trifle of the stabbing, friend?¹

Pietro and Violante, when they found life within his bare dingy palace so different from what they expected, and contrasted it with their former happy life in Rome, began to complain bitterly. This but inflamed Guido's hate. Accordingly he gave free rein to the cruelty of his nature, till

“ they crouched
“ —The two old frightened family spectres—close
“ In a corner, each on each like mouse on mouse
“ I' the cat's cage.”²

What chance they had of help from without may be seen from what Pompilia says of her attempt to help them:

when I gave
A jewel or two, themselves had given me,
Back to my parents,—since they wanted bread,
They who had never let me want a nosegay,—he
Spoke of the jail for felons, if they kept
What was first theirs, then mine, so doubly theirs.³

(“ He ” in the above passage is the Governor, the friend of Guido.) She adds concerning Guido's treatment of her parents that they were “ cheated, brow-beaten, stripped and starved, cast out into the kennel ”. After four months' experience of his cruelty they

Broke at last in their desperation loose,
Fled away for their lives, and lucky so.⁴

¹ *G.* 1131-67.

² *G.C.* 423-6.

³ *P.* 1267-72.

⁴ *O.H.R.* 530-1,

They made their way to Rome, Violante "ever ahead i' the march, quick at the bye-road and the cut across". Their whole wealth they had themselves, in the marriage articles, put into Guido's clutches, so that they returned beggars.

Pietro went back to beg from door to door,
In hope that memory not quite extinct
Of cheery days and festive nights would move
Friends and acquaintance.¹

Violante, however, had determined to confess the truth about Pompilia's birth to God

Whose finger unmistakably was felt
In all this retribution of the past.²

One thing gave her courage. The Pope having attained his eightieth year, held Jubilee, and so granted

Short shrift, prompt pardon for the light offence,
And no rough dealing with the regular crime
So this occasion were not suffered slip.³

In short it was Holy Year, which meant pardon for all who confessed. So when they reached Rome,

"I will," said she, "go burn out this bad hole
"That breeds the scorpion, baulk the plague at least
"Of hope to further plague by progeny:
"I will confess my fault, be punished, yes,
"But pardoned too: Saint Peter pays for all."⁴

Before pardon was granted Violante was commanded to do three things: first, to inform the true heirs to the usufruct that as Pompilia was no child of hers it would revert to them as before; second, to inform her husband that Pompilia being no daughter of his the contract by which

¹ O.H.R. 540-3.

² O.H.R. 552-3.

³ H.R. 541-3.

⁴ O.H.R. 561-5.

he alienated "his all in her behalf" was null and void; third, to inform Guido of the facts of Pompilia's birth and bear his anger.

Said and done:

Home went Violante, disbosomed all:
And Pietro who, six months before, had borne
Word after word of such a piece of news
Like so much cold steel inched through his breast-blade,
Now at its entry gave a leap for joy.

“What? All that used to be, may be again?
“My money mine again, my house, my land,
“My chairs and tables, all mine evermore?
“What, the girl's dowry never was the girl's,
“And, unpaid yet, is never now to pay?
“Then the girl's self, my pale Pompilia child
“That used to be my own with her great eyes—
“He who drove us forth, why should he keep her
“When proved as very a pauper as himself?
“Will she come back, with nothing changed at all?”¹

Pietro saw at once that here was his opportunity not only for recovering his property but also for revenging himself upon Guido,

“The lout-lord, bully-beggar, braggart-sneak,
“Who not content with cutting purse, crops ear—
“Assuredly it shall be salve to mine
“When this great news red-letters him, the rogue!”²

He at once took steps to accomplish this.

And so, he carried case before the courts;
And there Violante, blushing to the bone,
Made public declaration of her fault,
Renounced her motherhood, and prayed the law
To interpose, frustrate of its effect
Her folly, and redress the injury done.³

The case was indisputably clear,

¹ O.H.R. 613-31.

² O.H.R. 637-40.

³ O.H.R. 646-51.

For thirteen years are not so large a lapse,
And still six witnesses survived in Rome
To prove the truth o' the tale.¹

The one disastrous consequence which followed was that in the eyes of the world Guido seemed clearly to have been wronged in the marriage. He had married Pompilia because he thought her the only child of Pietro and Violante and heir to all they possessed. To him it was a simple case of barter, "mere rank against mere wealth". He had given the rank, ennobled Pompilia, and performed his part of the bargain, as he put it. Naturally enough

Guido pronounced the story one long lie
Lied to do robbery and take revenge.²

The case was carried on by Paul in Rome in place of Guido. The evidence was too strong for the Court to doubt, but feeling that Guido had been wronged they tried to please both parties.

They held the child to be a changeling,—good:
But, lest the husband got no good thereby,
They willed the dowry, though not hers at all,
Should yet be his, if not by right then grace—
Part-payment for the plain injustice done.
As for that other contract, Pietro's work,
Renunciation of his own estate,
That must be cancelled—give him back his gifts,
He was no party to the cheat at least!³

The result was that each having got half, based on that a claim for the whole, and at once appealed against the decision of the Court.

Cried Pietro "Is the child no child of mine?
Why give her a child's dowry?"—"Have I right
To the dowry, why not to the rest as well?"
Cried Guido, or cried Paolo in his name.⁴

¹ O.H.R. 654-6.

² O.H.R. 660-1.

³ O.H.R. 672-80.

⁴ O.H.R. 683-6.

The Court ordered the case to be reinvestigated, with the result that the matter was never decided. But Pietro and Violante, longing for revenge and not content with the mere legal proceedings, had published far and wide in Rome the tale of Guido's cruelty and meanness, his pride and poverty.

Their hope was that he would cast out Pompilia. Two things, however, prevented this. Had the case gone wholly against him he might have done so. But by the decision of the Court the dowry was secured to him, and he had still hopes that when the case was reinvestigated he might obtain the rest of Pietro's wealth. To cast her out then would have meant the throwing away of all he sought to gain by the marriage. This alone would have been enough to decide Guido. But more than that, in Pompilia lay his one chance of revenge on the Comparini. His hatred of them and her had been stirred to the depths by their action in Rome. Through her he could reach at them. As we see later also, his nature revolted against Pompilia's simple purity:

What you call my wife
I call a nullity in female shape,
Vapid disgust.¹

He imagines at first he has but a frail child to deal with, but as he finds that his plots against her fail,

By God's gift of a purity of soul
That will not take pollution, ermine like
Armed from dishonour by its own soft snow,²

finds in her an indomitable strength in bearing suffering and resisting evil, his impotence but adds fuel to his hatred. Instead, therefore, of casting out Pompilia he plans so to torture her that she will fly for refuge to the arms of some man to whom he could then point as her lover, and while

¹ *G.* 1112-4.

² *Pope*, 678-80.

heaping the shame and punishment on her and her so-called parents, stand guiltless before the world and retain his right to the dowry.

Rather did rage and hate so work in him,
Their product proved the horrible conceit
That he should plot and plan and bring to pass
His wife might, of her own free will and deed,
Relieve him of her presence, get her gone,
And yet leave all the dowry safe behind,
Confirmed his own henceforward past dispute,
While blotting out, as by a belch of hell,
Their triumph in her misery and death.¹

He could not, however, thrust her on the road he wished her to take. His success depended on his showing her to the world taking that road of her own free will. But he knew that if he succeeded in getting Pompilia to take the course he wished, the facts which had been published concerning her birth and her mother's degraded condition would be damning evidence against her and would be almost sufficient in itself to clear him. To make this position still stronger, and at the same time give the lie to all that the Comparini had reported in Rome concerning himself and his cruelty, he wrote in pencil a letter to Paul in Pompilia's name, in which he represented her as declaring that now Pietro and Violante were gone, the house which they had so disturbed and distracted by their quarrels and complaints was peace itself; that though it was true she had herself at times complained, these complaints were due to their prompting, their trumped up tales;

Their game had been to thwart her husband's love
And cross his will, malign his words and ways,
To reach this issue, furnish this pretence
For impudent withdrawal from their bond;²

and worse than that, their last injunction to her had been:

¹ *T.Q.* 747-55.

² *H.R.* 697-700.

That she should forthwith find a paramour,
 Complot with him to gather spoil enough,
 Then burn the house down,—taking previous care
 To poison all its inmates overnight,—
 And so companioned, so provisioned too,
 Follow to Rome and there join fortunes gay.¹

This letter Guido represents to her as simply a piece of courtesy to her brother-in-law. Pompilia could neither read nor write, but at his command she “retraced in ink” the letter thus written for her, utterly unconscious of its purport.

She had as readily re-traced the words
 Of her own death-warrant,—in some sort ’t was so.²

This letter, needless to say, Paul showed in Rome as Pompilia’s “authentic answer” to the stories of the Comparini. Knowing or guessing Guido’s plot, Paul took care to remark in public that he hoped this letter would not prove prophetic. He told

“ detractors too
 “ There ’s a plan formed, a programme figured here
 “ —Pray God no after-practice put to proof
 “ This letter cast no light upon, one day!”³

Having thus prepared Rome for what he hoped to show them, Guido now turns “to follow up the project” at Arezzo. Within his grim palace Pompilia was entirely at his mercy, and so he set himself to torture her “with due care”.

Accordingly did Guido set himself
 To worry up and down, across, around,
 The woman, hemmed in by her household bars,—
 Chase her about the coop of daily life,
 Having first stopped each outlet thence save one

¹ O.H.R. 745-50.

² O.H.R. 760-1.

³ O.H.R. 768-71.

Which, like bird with a ferret in her haunt,
She needs must seize as sole way of escape.

.

Now begins

The tenebrific passage of the tale:

How hold a light, display the cavern's gorge?¹

Before proceeding it will be well to give some little account of the two other members of Guido's family, his youngest brother Girolamo and his mother. Girolamo had entered the Church,

And, though unfledged wings kept him still i' the cage,
Yet he shot up to be a Canon.²

In his final summing up the Pope, after criticizing the characters of Guido and Paolo, thus describes Girolamo and their mother:

The boy of the brood, the young Girolamo
Priest, Canon, and what more? nor wolf nor fox,
But hybrid, neither craft nor violence
Wholly, part violence part craft: such cross
Tempts speculation—will both blend one day,
And prove hell's better product? . . .

.

For there 's a new distinctive touch, I see,
Lust—lacking in the two—hell's own blue tint
That gives a character and marks the man
More than a match for yellow and red. . . .

. Then comes
The gaunt grey nightmare in the furthest smoke,
The hag that gave these three abortions birth,
Unmotherly mother and unwomanly
Woman, that near turns motherhood to shame,
Womanliness to loathing: no one word,
No gesture to curb cruelty a whit.³

This is the household in which Pompilia is left, at the mercy of Guido and his plots, seemingly in her childlike

¹ *O.H.R.* 776-90.

² *T.Q.* 397-8.

³ *Pope*, 897-916.

ignorance of the world an easy prey and with nothing to guide her but her innate womanly sense of what is right and pure and her trust in God. The following incident I give in her own words, the purest in which this part of the tale can be told:

Remember I was barely twelve years old—
A child at marriage: I was let alone
For weeks, I told you, lived my child-life still
Even at Arezzo.

After the first, my husband, for hate's sake,
Said one eve, when the simpler cruelty
Seemed somewhat dull at edge and fit to bear,
"We have been man and wife six months almost:
"How long is this your comedy to last?
"Go this night to my chamber, not your own!"
At which word, I did rush—most true the charge—
And gain the Archbishop's house—he stands for God—
And fall upon my knees and clasp his feet,
Praying him hinder what my estranged soul
Refused to bear, though patient of the rest:
"Place me within a convent," I implored—
"Let me henceforward lead the virgin life
"You praise in Her you bid me imitate!"¹

To this the Archbishop makes the natural reply of the man of the world who, long since blinded in spirit, sees but the surface of the question and considers Pompilia but a foolish pouting child. He finishes with the remark "'Twas in your covenant". But Pompilia knew that in her marriage Guido "only stipulated for the wealth" and she represents his true motive in the words she puts into his mouth:

"Since our souls
"Stand each from each, a whole world's width between,
"Give me the fleshly vesture I can reach
"And rend and leave just fit for hell to burn!"²

and thus explains her resistance:

¹ P. 734-54.

² P. 781-4.

Why, in God's name, for Guido's soul's own sake
 Imperilled by polluting mine,—I say,
 I did resist; would I had overcome!
 My heart died out at the Archbishop's smile;
 —It seemed so stale and worn a way o' the world,
 As though 't were nature frowning.¹

He finally gets irritated, tells her this is why she calls her husband harsh, adding: "The poor Count has to manage a mere child". Pompilia therefore determines to lay the whole truth before him.

Then I resolved to tell a frightful thing.
 "I am not ignorant,—know what I say,
 "Declaring this is sought for hate, not love.
 "Sir, you may hear things like almighty God.
 "I tell you that my housemate, yes—the priest
 "My husband's brother, Canon Girolamo—
 "Has taught me what depraved and misnamed love
 "Means, and what outward signs denote the sin,
 "For he solicits me and says he loves,
 "The idle young priest with nought else to do.
 "My husband sees this, knows this, and lets be.
 "Is it your counsel I bear this beside?"²

To this he replies,

"More scandal, and against a priest this time!
 "What, 't is the Canon now?"—less snappishly—
 "Rise up, my child, for such a child you are,
 "The rod were too advanced a punishment."³

He then proceeds to answer her in a foolish parable, tacking on to it this moral.

"The moral,—fools elude their proper lot,
 "Tempt other fools, get ruined all alike.
 "Therefore go home, embrace your husband quick!
 "Which if his Canon brother chance to see,
 "He will the sooner back to book again."⁴

¹ P. 785-90.
 (D 485)

² P. 804-15.

³ P. 816-9.

⁴ P. 842-6.

Pompilia's last words regarding this incident show the beauty and depth of her character.

So, home I did go; so, the worst befell:
 So, I had proof the Archbishop was just man,
 And hardly that, and certainly no more.
 For, miserable consequence to me,
 My husband's hatred waxed nor waned at all,
 His brother's boldness grew effrontery soon,
 And my last stay and comfort in myself
 Was forced from me: henceforth I looked to God
 Only, nor cared my desecrated soul
 Should have fair walls, gay windows for the world.
 God's glimmer, that came through the ruin-top,
 Was witness why all lights were quenched inside:
 Henceforth I asked God counsel, not mankind.¹

Meanwhile Guido, intent on his plot, takes every opportunity of accusing Pompilia of the sin he wishes her to commit, as thus:

“ You are a coquette,
 “ A lure-owl posturing to attract birds,
 “ You look love-lures at theatre and church,
 “ In walk, at window!”²

He hopes thus to suggest to her the very course he wishes her to take and tries to terrify her into it by pretending at times to poison her, at times by drawing his sword and feigning thrusts at her. Pompilia, quite unaware of his aim, and hoping to please him, abjures “ walk, window, church, theatre, for good and all ”, thus “ just thwarting Guido's true intent ”. Finally in her despair she appeals to the Governor, though she knows he is Guido's friend, and has already had proof of it in the way he treated Pietro and Violante.

Yet, being in extremity, I fled
 To the Governor, as I say,—scarce opened lip

¹ P. 847-59.

² P. 677-80.

When—the cold cruel snicker close behind—
 Guido was on my trace, already there,
 Exchanging nod and wink for shrug and smile,
 And I—pushed back to him and, for my pains
 Paid with . . . but why remember what is past? ¹

For three years Pompilia lived this terrible life, alone at Guido's mercy. From her own words we see how she passed through misery to strength.

“ He laid a hand on me that burned all peace,
 “ All joy, all hope, and last all fear away.”²

But it is from Guido himself in his speech in prison the night before his execution that we get the finest picture of Pompilia at this time, a picture which shows that her indomitable power of bearing suffering brought him to the consciousness of his own impotence.

The following extracts from the speech, which is too long to quote in full, show this clearly.

Gaze at her, where I place her, to begin,
 Confound me with her gentleness and worth!

.
 She sits up, she lies down, she comes and goes,
 Kneels at the couch-side, overleans the sill
 O' the window, cold and pale and mute as stone,
 Strong as stone also. . . .

. Is it at the meal?
 “ Speak!” she obeys, “ Be silent!” she obeys,
 Counting the minutes till I cry “ Depart!”

.
 Departs she? just the same through door and wall
 I see the same stone strength of white despair.
 And all this will be never otherwise!

.
 The long black hair was wound now in a wisp,
 Crowned sorrow better than the wild web late:
 No more soiled dress, 't is trimness triumphs now,

¹ P. 1275-81.

² G. C. 776-7.

For how should malice go with negligence?
The frayed silk looked the fresher for her spite!

Now, mine she is if I please wring her neck,—
A moment of disquiet, working eyes,
Protruding tongue, a long sigh, then no more,—
As if one killed the horse one could not ride!
Had I enjoined "Cut off the hair!"—why, snap
The scissors, and at once a yard or so
Had fluttered in black serpents to the floor:
But till I did enjoin it, how she combs,
Uncurls and draws out to the complete length,
Plaits, places the insulting rope on head
To be an eyesore past dishevelment!
Is all done? Then sit still again and stare!
I advise—no one think to bear that look
Of steady wrong, endured as steadily.

This self-possession to the uttermost,
How does it differ in aught, save degree,
From the terrible patience of God?¹

At this point Guido felt that he was beaten, but could not, and indeed never did understand how he failed.

My fault . . . as God's my judge,
I see not where my fault lies, that's the truth!²

After about three years of this life, Pompilia felt her misery driving her to despair even of help from God. One day she "sought out a poor friar" "the Augustinian people name Romano", and to him confessed the sin to which her misery had driven her, "the frightfulness of my despair in God". The friar questioned her as to the cause of this.

"Since, though your husband outrage you," said he,
"That is a case too common, the wives die
"Or live, but do not sin so deep as this.'" ³

¹ G. 1299-1380.

² G. 1449-50.

³ G.C. 839-41.

She then confessed how, worse than her husband's hate,
she had to bear

"The love,—soliciting to shame called love,—
"Of his brother,—the young idle priest i' the house
"With only the devil to meet there."¹

The friar, seeing the gravity of the situation, counselled her to write to Pietro and Violante, and ask them to help her to escape. Pompilia pointed out that she could neither read nor write, that she had no money of her own, and was watched continually by her husband or his servants.

"I was watched to church,
"Am watched now, shall be watched back presently."²

How then was she even to hire a scribe in the public market-place? Pitying her desperate position, he promised to write for her. After she is gone, however, he reflects:

"Here am I, foolish body that I be,
"Caught all but pushing, teaching, who but I,
"My betters their plain duty,—what, I dare
"Help a case the Archbishop would not help,
"Mend matters, peradventure, God loves mar?
"What hath the married life but strifes and plagues
"For proper dispensation? So a fool
"Once touched the ark,—poor Uzzah that I am!
"Oh married ones, much rather should I bid,
"In patience all of ye possess your souls!
"This life is brief and troubles die with it:
"Where were the prick to soar up homeward else?"
So saying, he burnt the letter he had writ,
Said *Ave* for her intention, in its place,
Took snuff and comfort, and had done with all.³

Poor Pompilia "went back, heaven in her heart", but waited in vain for help and finally concluded that if the friar did write,

¹ *G.C.* 844-6.

² *T.Q.* 816-7.

³ *T.Q.* 827-41.

“ Why, they are dumb or dead:
 “ Either they give no credit to the tale,
 “ Or else, wrapped wholly up in their own joy
 “ Of such escape, they care not who cries, still
 “ I’ the clutches.”¹

Thus she is robbed of her last hope.

Last, in a desperation I appealed
 To friends, whoever wished me better days,
 To Guillichini, that ’s of kin,—“ What, I—
 “ Travel to Rome with you? A flying gout
 “ Bids me deny my heart and mind my leg!”
 Then I tried Conti, used to brave—laugh back
 The louring thunder when his cousin scowled
 At me protected by his presence: “ You—
 “ Who well know what you cannot save me from,—
 “ Carry me off ! What frightens you, a priest?”
 He shook his head, looked grave—“ Above my strength!
 “ Guido has claws that scratch, shows feline teeth;
 “ A formidabler foe than I dare fret:
 “ Give me a dog to deal with, twice the size!
 “ Of course I am a priest and Canon too,
 “ But . . . by the bye . . . though both, not quite so bold
 “ As he, my fellow-Canon, brother-priest,
 “ The personage in such ill odour here
 “ Because of the reports—pure birth o’ the brain!
 “ Our Caponsacchi, he ’s your true Saint George
 “ To slay the monster, set the Princess free,
 “ And have the whole High-Altar to himself:
 “ I always think so when I see that piece
 “ I’ the Pieve, that ’s his church and mine, you know:
 “ Though you drop eyes at mention of his name!”²

The advance of the story will make clear the full meaning of the last ten lines of the above quotation, but with this mention of Caponsacchi the chapter may fittingly close. He is the hero of our tale, and his entry is like a shaft of sunlight piercing into this dark den of misery and shame.

¹ G.C. 852-6.

² P. 1304-28.

IV

Yes, I am one of your body and a priest.
Also I am a younger son o' the House
Oldest now, greatest once, in my birth-town
Arezzo, I recognize no equal there.¹

Giuseppe Maria Caponsacchi was thus noble by birth. The family to which he belonged had been the "first of Fiesole", which still rang with the fame of his "progenitor Capo-in-Sacco".

When Florence ruined Fiesole, our folk
Migrated to the victor-city, and there
Flourished,—our palace and our tower attest,
In the Old Mercato,—this was years ago,
Four hundred, full,—no, it wants fourteen just.
Our arms are those of Fiesole itself,
The shield quartered with white and red.²

Caponsacchi had been educated for the Church, not merely because his noble birth would practically ensure his success in this calling, but also because his "father's father's brother" had been bishop of Arezzo sixty years before, and there had lived a life of such piety and humility that he was still "loved and looked to as a saint" in that city.

He spent to the last doit
His bishop's-revenue among the poor,
And used to tend the needy and the sick,
Barefoot, because of his humility.³

¹ *G.C.* 221-4.

² *G.C.* 231-7.

³ *G.C.* 245-8.

So the family considered that the young Caponsacchi had a sort of "right to the self-same office", and he was looked upon as a

bishop in the egg,
So, grew i' the garb and prattled in the school,
Was made expect, from infancy almost,
The proper mood o' the priest,¹

and all went well till the day came when he

must read the vows,
Declare the world renounced and undertake
To become priest and leave probation.²

He "stopped short awestruck" before the ideal life painted in the vows which he was to take and keep.

"How shall holiest flesh
Engage to keep such vow inviolate,
How much less mine? I know myself too weak,
Unworthy! Choose a worthier stronger man!"³

The bishop, however, a thoroughly practical man of the world, stopped him in the midst of his protestation.

"Incapable?
Qualmish of conscience? Thou ingenuous boy!
Clear up the clouds and cast thy scruples far!
I satisfy thee there 's an easier sense
Wherein to take such vow than suits the first
Rough rigid reading."⁴

Nobody, he said, wanted him to become a martyr, to prop the Church by breaking his backbone, though that was the necessary way once "when Diocletian flourished and his like", but this "building of the buttress work" had been done "by martyrs and confessors", and so "let it bide"; the work now was not to build but to adorn the building:

¹ G.C. 258-61.

² G.C. 262-4.

³ G.C. 268-71.

⁴ G.C. 273-8.

- “ Add not a brick, but, where you see a chink,
 “ Stick in a sprig of ivy or root a rose
 “ Shall make amends and beautify the pile!”¹

In place of “ the first rough rigid reading ” of the vows which has so startled and awed Caponsacchi, he puts forward the following for him, as a suitable profession on entering the Church:

- “ ‘ Take notice, I the young and free
 “ ‘ And well-to-do i’ the world, thus leave the world,
 “ ‘ Cast in my lot thus with no gay young world
 “ ‘ But the grand old church: she tempts me of the two!’ ”²

The bishop makes quite clear to him that he will be considered an acquisition to the Church, and that far from his having to renounce his former manner of life as a young nobleman, this is just what he must continue, as from this springs his worth. His value to the Church lies apparently in the very fact that he is a brilliant young nobleman, a writer of madrigals, a man of influence in society. The close of the bishop’s address to Caponsacchi shows clearly the nature of the man and the ideal he puts before this young aspirant to the priesthood.

- “ Saint Paul has had enough and to spare, I trow,
 “ Of ragged run-away Onesimus:
 “ He wants the right-hand with the signet-ring
 “ Of King Agrippa, now, to shake and use.
 “ I have a heavy scholar cloistered up,
 “ Close under lock and key, kept at his task
 “ Of letting Fénelon know the fool he is,
 “ In a book I promise Christendom next Spring.
 “ Why, if he covets so much meat, the clown,
 “ As a lark’s wing next Friday, or, any day,
 “ Diversion beyond catching his own fleas,
 “ He shall be properly swung, I promise him.
 “ But you, who are so quite another paste

¹ G.C. 297-9.

² G.C. 305-8.

" Of a man,—do you obey me? Cultivate
 " Assiduous that superior gift you have
 " Of making madrigals—(who told me? Ah!)
 " Get done a Marinesque Adoniad straight
 " With a pulse o' the blood a-pricking, here and there,
 " That I may tell the lady ' And he's ours! ' ”¹

These terms, as Caponsacchi said, changed all. He felt himself quite good enough for the life thus painted, felt that he could enter the Church without fear if this was all that was expected of him, and so, accepting this interpretation of the vows on the authority of the bishop, he became a priest. He lived the life thus prescribed, a courtly churchman:

Conformed myself, both read the breviary
 And wrote the rhymes, was punctual to my place
 I' the Pieve, and as diligent at my post
 Where beauty and fashion rule.²

He advanced quickly both in the Church and in society, soon became a canon, and

the authority
 For delicate play at tarocs, and arbiter
 O' the magnitude of fan-mounts.³

The bishop, delighted with so promising a pupil, aids him at every point with worldly advice, directing him to whom to pay court, and telling him not to take the church-work so seriously:

" Therefore, don't prove so indispensable
 " At the Pieve, sit more loose i' the seat, nor grow
 " A fixture by attendance morn and eve! " ”⁴

He warns him that " Arezzo is just a haven mid-way Rome ", that " Rome's the eventual harbour ", and that the essentials for success at Rome are,

¹ G.C. 317-35.

² G.C. 344-7.

³ G.C. 348-50.

⁴ G.C. 365-7.

“ A polished presence, a genteel manner, wit
 “ At will, and tact at every pore of you!”¹

So Caponsacchi lived for three or four years. One evening at the beginning of March and about the end of Carnival he happened to be at the theatre with Canon Conti, Guido's cousin, when he saw

enter, stand, and seat herself
 A lady, young, tall, beautiful, strange and sad.²

This was Pompilia. While Caponsacchi was still looking at her in wonder, Conti broke in with “ Nay, I'll make her give you back your gaze ”, and tossing “ a paper-twist of comfits to her lap ”, he dodged behind Caponsacchi and stood nodding at her over his shoulder.

Then she turned,
 Looked our way, smiled the beautiful sad strange smile.³

Conti explained to Caponsacchi who she was, gave him some idea of her miserable life, and pointed out “ Guido, the old scape-grace ” “ lurking there i' the black o' the box ”. Observing, however, that Guido was bending his brows on them, and fearing he had offended him, he drew away Caponsacchi's attention, adding:

“ I was a fool
 “ To fling the sweetmeats. Prudence, for God's love!
 “ To-morrow I 'll make my peace, e'en tell some fib,
 “ Try if I can't find means to take you there.”⁴

At vespers the next evening, Conti told him he had tried in vain, that Guido had seen him staring and “ don't incline to know you nearer ”.

¹ G.C. 371-2.

² G.C. 398-9.

³ G.C. 411-2.

⁴ G.C. 430-3.

“ The man would lick your shoe
 “ If you and certain efficacious friends
 “ Managed him warily,—but there ’s the wife:
 “ Spare her, because he beats her, as it is,
 “ She ’s breaking her heart quite fast enough.”¹

He finished by advising him to console himself with other ladies of his acquaintance.

But all Caponsacchi’s deeper nature had awakened at the sight of Pompilia.

That night and next day did the gaze endure,
 Burnt to my brain, as sunbeam thro’ shut eyes,
 And not once changed the beautiful sad strange smile.²

As a courtly young priest he has played with the affections of woman, and now when he least expects it, at a play in a public theatre, the reality of human love in all its beauty, its purity, its intensity, flashes upon him. In its light he sees at once the hypocrisy, the hollowness of the social life around him and his soul revolts against it. This is the turning-point in the lives of both Caponsacchi and Pompilia. At about the same time, some three or four years before their meeting at the theatre, they were both called upon to take certain vows and enter upon a new sphere of life. Pompilia shrank from the marriage but was swayed by the desire of Violante. Caponsacchi felt himself unworthy to enter the Church but was swayed by the arguments of the bishop. When they meet at the theatre each at once recognizes that life so far has been empty, that here is the one who might have made it complete. The years since her marriage have been for Pompilia years of daily temptation and trial, years of hopeless misery both for body and soul, and now her life is near its end. She has only about ten months to live, but in that time she has to learn from the purity of her love for Capon-

¹ G.C. 442-6.

² G.C. 434-6.

sacchi and her joy in the birth of her child, how divine life on this earth can be. The years since he entered the Church have been for Caponsacchi years of ease and pleasure, years in which, except at intervals, his deeper nature has slumbered. He too has to tread as Pompilia has done before him the kingdom of our "Ladies of Sorrow"; he too has to learn in the glory of his love and self-sacrifice for Pompilia, and in the agony of his despair at her death, the heights and depths of human joy and sorrow. Roused by this meeting with Pompilia, he turns at once with disgust from the shallow life he has been leading and devotes himself to his Church. We see the change in his words:

" 'T is more amusing to go pace at eve
 " I' the Duomo,—watch the day's last gleam outside
 " Turn, as into a skirt of God's own robe,
 " Those lancet-windows' jewelled miracle,—
 " Than go eat the Archbishop's ortolans,
 " Digest his jokes. Luckily Lent is near:
 " Who cares to look will find me in my stall
 " At the Pieve, constant to this faith at least—
 " Never to write a canzonet any more."¹

This change, however, did not suit the bishop who, the next week, called him to account, demanding what he meant by neglecting his place in society and playing "truant in church all day long". "Are you turning Molinist?" he asked. Caponsacchi replied at once:

" Sir, what if I turned Christian? It might be.
 " The fact is, I am troubled in my mind,
 " Beset and pressed hard by some novel thoughts.
 " This your Arezzo is a limited world;
 " There's a strange Pope,—'t is said, a priest who thinks.
 " Rome is the port, you say: to Rome I go.
 " I will live alone, one does so in a crowd,
 " And look into my heart a little."²

¹ G.C. 459-67.

² G.C. 474-81.

He told his friends that at the end of Lent he would go to Rome.

Meanwhile it will be interesting to go back a little and find what were the effects on Pompilia and Guido of this chance meeting at the theatre. Pompilia had been brought to this play not knowing why her husband took her there. He placed her in the front of the box, facing the whole audience, "the crowd with upturned faces, eyes one stare, voices one buzz", while, as she puts it, he "crouched down, breathed cold through me from behind, stationed i' the shadow—none in front could see". Pompilia "looked but to the stage" while her thoughts, wafted by the music, soared away from the unhappy present to the happy past, to Rome, "set me down there a happy child again". A remark her parents were accustomed to make, but which she as a child had never understood, returned to her mind:

"might we haply see the proper friend
"Throw his arm over you and make you safe." ¹

Suddenly the paper of comfits fell into her lap and she was brought back at once to the present. Looking round to see who flung them she faced Caponsacchi, who, as we know, was gazing at her. Her woman's instinct, quicker than her reason, told her at once that "whoever flung them, his was not the hand", and her first thought was that here was "the proper friend" at last. The next moment she saw Conti nodding and smiling to her and knew at once that he had thrown them.

He was my husband's cousin, privileged
To throw the thing: the other, silent, grave,
Solemn almost, saw me, as I saw him.²

Caponsacchi's face,

¹ P. 972-3.

² P. 988-90.

The broad brow that reverberates the truth,
And flashed the word God gave him, back to man,¹

and his serious, earnest gaze, awakened at once the soul of Pompilia, and the thought flashed into her mind:

" Had there been a man like that,
" To lift me with his strength out of all strife
" Into the calm, how I could fly and rest!
" I have a keeper in the garden here
" Whose sole employment is to strike me low
" If ever I, for solace, seek the sun.

" Suppose that man had been instead of this!"²

Presently Conti advanced to her and laughingly apologized for throwing the comfits with such force.

" Cousin, I flung them brutishly and hard!
" Because you must be hurt, to look austere
" As Caponsacchi yonder, my tall friend
" A-gazing now. Ah Guido, you so close?
" Keep on your knees, do! Beg her to forgive!
" My cornet battered like a cannon-ball.
" Good-bye, I 'm gone!"³

But Guido had not been asleep. He saw well who threw the comfits, but saw also how earnestly Caponsacchi had gazed at his wife, perhaps guessed also from Pompilia's face what was passing in her mind, and thought he had found, at last, a chance of working out his plot successfully. That night at supper he broke out on Pompilia:

" Why was that throwing, that buffoonery?
" Do you think I am your dupe? What man would dare
" Throw comfits in a stranger lady's lap?
" 'T was knowledge of you bred such insolence
" In Caponsacchi; he dared shoot the bolt,
" Using that Conti for his stalking-horse.

¹ P. 1796-7.

² P. 998-1007.

³ P. 1010-6.

“ How could you see him this once and no more,
“ When he is always haunting hereabout
“ At the street-corner or the palace-side,
“ Publishing my shame and your impudence?
“ You are a wanton,—I a dupe, you think?
“ O Christ, what hinders that I kill her quick?”
Whereat he drew his sword and feigned a thrust.¹

Pompilia merely stated the truth of the matter and was silent. Guido followed this up by declaring that this amour was the town talk, and finished by threatening to “ pink ” Caponsacchi through “ his lily-scented cassock ” the next time he found him beneath her eaves. The threat, however, carried little fear with it, for he had often before “ threatened with the sword ” and done nothing. All Pompilia said was:

“ Let God save the innocent!
“ Moreover death is far from a bad fate.
“ I shall go pray for you and me, not him;
“ And then I look to sleep, come death, or worse,
“ Life.”²

But Guido aimed also at tricking Caponsacchi, and luring him by means of letters written in Pompilia’s name, into the snare laid for both of them. This was perhaps the greatest mistake he made. Confident of his own astuteness and his knowledge of the world, he was blind entirely to that world beyond his own knowledge. He had seen Caponsacchi gazing at his wife and concluded that he must be enamoured of her beauty. The mystery and purity of human love were quite beyond the conception of Guido. That Caponsacchi by its power could read at one glance the nature of Pompilia, her simple purity, nobility, and sweetness, he was so far from perceiving, that he imagined he could forge letters which Caponsacchi would mistake for hers. I would draw attention to the

¹ P. 1018–30.

² P. 1046–50.

two letters which follow as they show how absurd, how ludicrous was Guido's attempt to mislead him, how far he was from understanding the nature with which he was dealing. One evening, a week or so after the meeting at the theatre, Caponsacchi was sitting musing alone "over the opened Summa", "darkened round by the mid-March twilight". He felt that his whole life had shaken under him, and saw what a gap there was between his life as it had been and as it should have been, how, by forgetting the vows he had taken and the ideal so clearly stated in them, he had sunk, aspiring little and achieving less; but more keenly than all else he felt what a gulf there seemed to be between himself, "a priest and celibate", and "the sad strange wife of Guido"; how

I had a whole store of strengths
Eating into my heart, which craved employ,
And she, perhaps, need of a finger's help,—
And yet there was no way in the wide world
To stretch out mine and so relieve myself.¹

When he tried to fix his thoughts on the "Summa",

Her smile kept glowing out of it, as to mock
The silence we could break by no one word.²

He was roused by a tap at the door and a whisper. On his commanding the person to speak out, a woman, masked, glided into the room, "laid lightly a letter on the opened Book", and stood as if impatiently waiting a reply.

I took the letter, read to the effect
That she, I lately flung the comfits to,
Had a warm heart to give me in exchange,
And gave it,—loved me and confessed it thus,
And bade me render thanks by word of mouth,
Going that night to such a side o' the house

¹ G.C. 495-9.

² G.C. 501-2.

Where the small terrace overhangs a street
 Blind and deserted, not the street in front:
 Her husband being away, the surly patch,
 At his villa of Vittiano.¹

He turned to the woman and asked her who she was. She replied "Count Guido's kind of maid", adding that they all hated him, and that as Pompilia suffered much it was but just that they should aid her, "specially since her choice is fixed so well". Caponsacchi saw through the trick at once and taking a pen wrote:

"No more of this! That you are fair, I know:
 "But other thoughts now occupy my mind.
 "I should not thus have played the insensible
 "Once on a time. What made you,—may one ask,—
 "Marry your hideous husband? 'T was a fault,
 "And now you taste the fruit of it. Farewell."²

As the woman snatched it up and hurried off he smiled to himself to think of Guido's feelings on receiving it.

"There, let the jealous miscreant,—Guido's self,
 "Whose mean soul grins through this transparent trick,—
 "Be baulked so far, defrauded of his aim!"³

A month before he would probably have "accepted the mock invitation" and gone with "cudgel beneath cloak" prepared to pull Guido out of his hiding-place,

"Behind the gown of this part-messenger
 "Part-mistress who would personate the wife."⁴

But he is no longer in the mood for such things. Next morning the messenger returned with another, a more fulsome letter, in which the writer blamed him for cruelty, and asked why he feared to come; was it that he loved someone else, "the Baron's daughter or the Advocate's

¹ G.C. 510-9.

² G.C. 529-34.

³ G.C. 536-8.

⁴ G.C. 553-4.

wife, or both?" If so, she was quite content so he would make her the third: she was tortured by a monster; would he not carry her to Rome with him? She begged him not to write, but come that evening. "So you gave my line to the merry lady?" he asked.

"She kissed off the wax,
"And put what paper was not kissed away,
"In her bosom to go burn: but merry, no!
"She wept all night when evening brought no friend,
"Alone, the unkind missive at her breast,"¹

she replied. Wishing to lead her on he continued: "What risk do we run o' the husband?" The woman, Margherita by name, fell at once into the trap; it came to her in a flash that fear of Guido had caused him to refuse the first invitation. She assured him there was no risk, that Guido was at his villa at Vittiano, that he suspected Canon Conti and not him,

"And then his wife's a child:
"Does he think a child outwits him? A mere child:
"Yet so full grown, a dish for any duke.
"Don't quarrel longer with such cates, but come!"²

Once again Caponsacchi took pen and wrote:

"In vain do you solicit me.
"I am a priest: and you are wedded wife,
"Whatever kind of brute your husband prove,
"I have scruples, in short. Yet should you really show
"Sign at the window . . . but nay, best be good!
"My thoughts are elsewhere."³

As she again hurries off triumphant with the letter, he pictures Guido and his maid waiting for him at the window, chuckling over the breakdown of his resolution, but, as the time passes, falling furiously the one on the other in

¹ G.C. 577-81.

² G.C. 593-6

³ G.C. 597-602.

their disappointment. Still, however, the letters continued to come for about a month:

I was met i' the street, made sign to in the church,
 A slip was found i' the door-sill, scribbled word
 "Twixt page and page o' the prayer-book in my place.
 A crumpled thing dropped even before my feet,
 Pushed through the blind, above the terrace rail,
 As I passed, by day, the very window once.
 And ever from corners would be peering up
 The messenger, with the self-same demand
 "Obdurate still, no flesh but adamant?
 "Nothing to cure the wound, assuage the throe
 "O' the sweetest lamb that ever loved a bear?"
 And ever my one answer in one tone—
 "Go your ways, temptress! Let a priest read, pray,
 "Unplagued of vain talk, visions not for him!
 "In the end, you 'll have your will and ruin me!"¹

This same play was acted out with Pompilia, but in her case with more of the grimness of tragedy. Margherita, "called my waiting-maid", "whom it is said my husband found too fair", had been present when the accusation concerning Caponsacchi was made, and entered with heart and soul into the plot to ruin her. After the accusation she "never once would let the matter rest". She represented herself as being in league with Caponsacchi; told Pompilia her husband was a jealous fool, and that the best way to cure him would be to give him good cause for jealousy and praised Caponsacchi until Pompilia stopped her ears. One day about a week after the accusation she said:

"A week is gone; you comb your hair,
 "Then go mope in a corner, cheek on palm.
 "Till night comes round again,—so, waste a week
 "As if your husband menaced you in sport."²

She adds with reference to Guido that she knows his

¹ *G.C.* 621-35.

² *P.* 1061-4.

tricks, and that if Pompilia does not take some steps to warn Caponsacchi of his danger:

- " The priest will perish; you will grieve too late;
 " So shall the city-ladies' handsomest
 " Frankest and liberalest gentleman
 " Die for you, to appease a scurvy dog
 " Hanging 's too good for. Is there no escape?
 " Were it not simple Christian charity
 " To warn the priest be on his guard,—save him
 " Assured death, save yourself from causing it?
 " I meet him in the street. Give me a glove,
 " A ring to show for token! Mum 's the word." ¹

The gist of Pompilia's reply is given in the following lines.

- " Even if you speak truth and a crime is planned,
 " Leave help to God as I am forced to do!
 " There is no other help, or we should craze,
 " Seeing such evil with no human cure.

 " Never address me on this subject more!" ²

Margherita now makes her first visit to Caponsacchi and gives him the forged letter. On her return she bursts out on Pompilia:

- " But I went, all the same,
 " —Ay, saw your Caponsacchi in his house,
 " And come back stuffed with news I must outpour." ³

According to her tale she had told him that her mistress was a stone, that Guido was on the prowl for him, and had advised him to console himself with other ladies of the town; while Caponsacchi " turned first white and then red ", and then declaring that he would obey the wish of Pompilia whom he loved with body and soul, begged her to take one letter as a farewell message to her.

¹ P. 1083-92.

² P. 1097-1104.

³ P. 1105-7.

“ This is what he wrote.
 “ I know you cannot read,—therefore, let me!
 “ ‘ *My Idol!* ’ ”¹

Pompilia, however, is not to be deceived.

But I took it from her hand
 And tore it into shreds. “ Why join the rest
 Who harm me? Have I ever done you wrong?
 People have told me ’t is you wrong myself:
 Let it suffice I either feel no wrong
 Or else forgive it,—yet you turn my foe!
 The others hunt me and you throw a noose!”
 She muttered “ Have your wilful way!” I slept.²

Guido’s efforts at this time to drive Pompilia into Caponsacchi’s arms rendered her sufferings so acute that,

when misery was most,
 One day, I swooned and got a respite so.
 She stooped as I was slowly coming to,
 This Margherita, ever on my trace,
 And whispered—“ Caponsacchi!”

For the first time, I let her have her will,
 Heard passively.³

Since your suffering is so great, she urges, will you not yet allow Caponsacchi to help you? He still writes to you and perhaps may kill himself in despair. She then proceeds to give her the substance of a sonnet, written as she says by Caponsacchi, in which he asked her for an interview to arrange for her escape from her husband. She offers to write for her and grant the interview, “ or what is better lead you to his house ”. In closing, she attempts cleverly to lead Pompilia into declaring her love for Caponsacchi.

¹ P. 1123-5.

² P. 1126-33.

³ P. 1136-45.

"Your husband dashes you against the stones;
 "This man would place each fragment in a shrine:
 "You hate him, love your husband!"¹

Nothing is more remarkable in the character of Pompilia than her womanly instinct for the pure and the true. It is absolutely unerring, and from it comes a great part of her strength. What others might discover she seems to know at once. However terrible her life, however much she suffered, from one trial she was at least free. She never had to ask where her duty lay. The Pope, referring to the difficulty of picking out the right path through life, describes her as one who knows "the right place by foot's feel". Even Caponsacchi mistakes the path at times, but she never. And so here again the tricks and lies fail. She replies:

"It is not true I love my husband,—no,
 "Nor hate this man. I listen while you speak,
 "—Assured that what you say is false, the same:

.

"I have seen so much
 "By that adventure at the spectacle,
 "The face I fronted that one first, last time:
 "He would belie it by such words and thoughts.
 "Therefore while you profess to show him me,
 "I ever see his own face. Get you gone!"²

Margherita departs vowing she will never say another word on the subject, but needless to say returns to it at the first opportunity. This is the time of deepest despair for Pompilia. Life to her is a weary burden; her one hope death. But now comes suddenly on her the consciousness of her coming motherhood, and at the thought of her duty to her unborn babe she rises at once above all weakness and fear.

¹ P. 1160-2.

² P. 1164-86.

It had got half through April. I arose
 One vivid daybreak,—who had gone to bed
 In the old way my wont those last three years,
 Careless until, the cup drained, I should die.¹

The night before Margherita had told her that Easter
 being now at an end everyone, even Caponsacchi, was
 going to Rome. This she heard with utter indifference,
 her sole thought

Being still, as night came, “ Done, another day!
 “ How good to sleep and so get nearer death!”—
 When, what, first thing at daybreak, pierced the sleep
 With a summons to me? Up I sprang alive,
 Light in me, light without me, everywhere
 Change!

.
 I stepped forth,
 Stood on the terrace,—o’er the roofs, such sky!
 My heart sang, “ I too am to go away,
 “ I too have something I must care about,
 “ Carry away with me to Rome, to Rome!”²

The night before she had “ almost prayed for leave to die ”,
 “ Wished Guido all his pleasure with the sword
 “ Or the poison.”³

But now she felt that her life was charmed because of the
 charge laid on her, to fulfil which she must not only live
 but escape from Guido.

“ Not to live, now, would be the wickedness,—
 “ For life means to make haste and go to Rome
 “ And leave Arezzo, leave all woes at once!”⁴

Now, as I stood letting morn bathe me bright,
 Choosing which butterfly should bear my news,—
 The white, the brown one, or that tinier blue,—
 The Margherita, I detested so,
 In she came.⁵

¹ P. 1200-3.² P. 1220-39.³ P. 1249-50.⁴ P. 1257-9.⁵ P. 1344-8.

Margherita reverted at once to the subject of Caponsacchi and his journey to Rome. We must remember that Pompilia had seen Caponsacchi but once, at the theatre; that since then his name had been coupled continually with her own by her husband and maid and always with the suggestion of what to her was hateful; that in spite of this his face as she had seen it came back ever to her mind and gave the lie to all they said. Thus to her

That name had got to take a half-grotesque
Half-ominous, wholly enigmatic sense.¹

But now, bent on escaping, she determines to try this man. She knows the danger of her plan, but feels her own power so increased by the new force in her that she no longer hesitates. "I turned—'Tell Caponsacchi he may come!'" At first Margherita gazes at her in a sort of breathless surprise, but there follows immediately a flash of evil triumph as she imagines she sees Pompilia in the net at last.

"Tell him to come? Ah, but, for charity,
"A truce to fooling! Come? What,—come this eve?
"Peter and Paul! But I see through the trick!
"Yes, come, and take a flower-pot on his head,
"Flung from your terrace! No joke, sincere truth?"²

Pompilia, as her words show, saw clearly all that was passing in the woman's mind.

How plainly I perceived hell flash and fade
O' the face of her,—the doubt that first paled joy,
Then, final reassurance I indeed
Was caught now, never to be free again!
What did I care?—who felt myself of force
To play with silk, and spurn the horsehair-springs.³

Margherita declared that she had known all along that

¹ P. 1329-30.

² P. 1359-63.

³ P. 1364-69.

Pompilia in her heart really wanted Caponsacchi, and accordingly had often invited him to come and used her name too, but all in vain, for he would never believe that the message really came from her, and she asked:

“What is the message that shall move him now?”

“After the Ave Maria, at first dark,
“I will be standing on the terrace, say!”

“I would I had a good long lock of hair
“Should prove I was not lying! Never mind!”

Off she went—“May he not refuse, that’s all—
“Fearing a trick!”

I answered, “He will come.”
And all day, I sent prayer like incense up
To God the strong, God the beneficent,
God ever mindful in all strife and strait,
Who, for our own good, makes the need extreme,
Till at the last he puts forth might and saves.¹

.
And still, as the day wore, the trouble grew
Whereby I guessed there would be born a star,
Until at an intense throe of the dusk,
I started up, was pushed, I dare to say,
Out on the terrace, leaned and looked at last
Where the deliverer waited me: the same
Silent and solemn face, I first descried
At the spectacle, confronted mine once more.²

But why then had Caponsacchi come? As we know he had seen through the trick of the letters. Every sort of device had been used to lure him into visiting Pompilia but in vain. Yet Pompilia sent her message by the woman who had attempted so often to deceive him that there was no chance of his trusting her. What then had brought

¹ P. 1376-88.

² P. 1404-11.

him? One day he received a letter of a different kind in which the same writer, i.e. Guido in Pompilia's name, warned him not to come; that her husband had at last discovered her love for him and was back in Arezzo; that perhaps the best thing he could do would be to fly to Rome; at any rate not to come to the window as her husband might be posted there. Here is his answer to the letter:

“ You raise my courage, or call up
“ My curiosity, who am but man.
“ Tell him he owns the palace, not the street
“ Under—that 's his and yours and mine alike.
“ If it should please me pad the path this eve,
“ Guido will have two troubles, first to get
“ Into a rage and then get out again.
“ Be cautious, though: at the *Ave!*”¹

As we know, he had been pestered with fulsome letters and messages for more than a month and at last, as he puts it, he had “ tired of the same long black teasing lie obtruded thus at every turn ”, and decided to go to the window. He guessed that Guido would conclude he was tempted by “ the new bait of adventure ”, and determined at least to teach him a lesson.

“ Though the imprisoned lady keeps afar,
“ There will they lie in ambush, heads alert,
“ Kith, kin and Count mustered to bite my heel.
“ No mother nor brother viper of the brood
“ Shall scuttle off without the instructive bruise!”²

He went, quite unaware that Pompilia had that morning for the first time really sent for him. He went, expecting a comedy, and when he arrived close to the house he had difficulty in restraining his laughter and was prepared to cry out the moment he came opposite the window:

¹ G.C. 651-8.

² G.C. 686-90.

“ ‘ Out of the hole you hide in, on to the front,
 “ ‘ Count Guido Franceschini, show yourself !
 “ ‘ Hear what a man thinks of a thing like you,
 “ ‘ And after, take this foulness in your face!’ ”

The words lay living on my lip, I made
 The one-turn more—and there at the window stood,
 Framed in its black square length, with lamp in hand,
 Pompilia; the same great, grave, grievful air
 As stands i’ the dusk, on altar that I know,
 Left alone with one moonbeam in her cell,
 Our Lady of all the Sorrows. Ere I knelt—
 Assured myself that she was flesh and blood—
 She had looked one look and vanished.¹

Caponsacchi concluded at once that Guido had stationed her there on some pretence,

And on my lip again was—“ Out with thee,
 “ Guido!” When all at once she re-appeared;
 But, this time, on the terrace overhead,
 So close above me, she could almost touch
 My head if she bent down; and she did bend,
 While I stood still as stone, all eye, all ear.²

She began at once by referring to the letters she supposed he had written, telling him she could neither read nor write, but that Margherita, her maid, had explained their sense to her, forcing her to listen whether she would or no. From these letters she had learned that Caponsacchi loved her, desired “ to live or die as I shall bid ”. Surely, she said, you cannot have written this, “ such wickedness were deadly to us both ”.

“ But good true love would help me now so much—
 “ I tell myself, you may mean good and true.”³

She told him her position was such that she was forced to seek help from someone, and how strange it seemed to her

¹ G.G. 697-709.

² G.G. 719-24.

³ G.G. 737-8.

that he, without knowing her and led only by his sympathy with her trouble, should come "proffering assistance", but added that it was just a piece with the rest of her strange life. She then suggested vaguely why she so wished to live, and proceeded to tell him of her life with Guido, his treatment of Pietro and Violante, and of herself. She appealed to him to take her to Rome.

"You go to Rome, the servant makes me hear.

"Take me as you would take a dog, I think,

"Masterless left for strangers to maltreat."¹

"You know how weak the strongest women are.

"How could I find my way there by myself?"²

She then related the various attempts she had made herself, her vain appeals to the Archbishop, the Governor, and the Friar, and how the letters she supposed he had sent had affected her, how at first he seemed to come in like a thief upon her, but that that morning she had determined to try whether the thief had not some "honest touch" in him.

"But now, that you stand and I see your face,

"Though you have never uttered word yet,—well, I know,

"Here too has been dream-work, delusion too,

"And that at no time, you with the eyes here,

"Ever intended to do wrong by me,

"Nor wrote such letters therefore. It is false,

"And you are true, have been true, will be true.

"To Rome then,—when is it you take me there.

"Each minute lost is mortal. When? I ask."³

There is something wonderfully noble in Caponsacchi's quiet and simple acceptance of the task. There is no need for question and answer between them, no need for him to ponder the wisdom of the course, and he was far above fear. Pompilia called him, and to her service, conscious of

¹ G.C. 812-4.

² G.C. 823-4.

³ G.C. 872-80.

her noble purity and her great need, he devoted himself, his love solemnized and chastened by the impassable barriers between them. To him she seemed already to wear "an invisible crown of martyr and saint", and she called on him to do a man's duty to help the weak and suffering though in the task he should perish. He replied simply that he would go at once and do as she wished, that he would require a day to make the preparations for the journey, but would be ready the next evening to carry her off and asked how he was to see her and assure her escape. She told him to pass the window the next night at the same time; if she was at the window he could speak to her; if not, he was to drop a handkerchief and she would see from where she watched and know that all was well; he was then to return evening after evening until they got an opportunity of meeting and speaking. "To-morrow at this hour I pass", he said, and she withdrew. Needless to say Caponsacchi saw at once from Pompilia's tale the double game Guido had played, and that he had forged letters for both. But he gloried in the victory that truth had gained unaided, gloried in the fact that as he

"Recognized her, at potency of truth,
 "So she, by the crystalline soul, knew me,
 "Never mistook the signs."¹

When he leaves Pompilia his mind is like a "sea of passion". For more than a month his life had been almost an agony of restraint. He tells us how

I had a whole store of strengths
 Eating into my heart, which craved employ,
 And she, perhaps, need of a finger's help,
 And yet there was no way in the wide world
 To stretch out mine and so relieve myself.²

And now the way of relief has come. Pompilia herself has

¹ G.C. 932-4.

² G.C. 495-9.

called him to aid her, to risk his all for her good, and has given him the opportunity of showing in this self-sacrifice the full power of his love.

Powerless, all that night
I paced the city: it was the first Spring.
By the invasion I lay passive to,
In rushed new things, the old were rapt away.

.
Into another state, under new rule,
I knew myself was passing swift and sure.¹

In the grey of the morning he found himself facing "the pillared front of the Pieve", his church, and for the first time it seemed to speak to him of his duties as a priest. "The rescue of this woman," it seemed to say, "is a work in the world out of your sphere and should be left for those who are free, but you who have vowed to leave the world and devote yourself to me, should remain at your post." Alone in the silence of the morning, burning to devote himself to the rescue of Pompilia and thinking that in so doing he is sacrificing himself in God's service, he is suddenly confronted thus with the thought that he is deliberately casting aside the duties he has sworn to perform, that he is not free to choose his own work, being already bound to the Church, that the real act of self-sacrifice will consist in his denying himself the joy of rescuing Pompilia, in his trusting all to God and remaining at his post. To his awakened soul it seemed as if God himself had spoken, asking of him a sacrifice greater infinitely than Pompilia had asked, a work of real self-denial.

"How true,
"I am a priest! I see the function here:
"I thought the other way self-sacrifice:
"This is the true, seals up the perfect sum.
"I pay it, sit down, silently obey."

¹ G.C. 945-65.

So I went home. Dawn broke, noon broadened, I—
 I sat stone-still, let time run over me.
 The sun slanted into my room, had reached
 The west.¹

In vain he tried to read; there seemed but one word on the page—"Pompilia". Sunset came, and now he felt that she would be counting the minutes, waiting till he should come to say that all was ready. But his duty to God and to her seemed clear. He could but hope that God without his aid would save her by one miracle the more. Hoping that prayer might avail he went to Vespers. Returning he sat alone in the darkness of the night, feeling all the bitterness of his trial, longing that Pompilia could but know that were it certainly for her good that he should aid her to escape, he would do it, even at the cost of breaking his priestly vows. The idea flashes into his mind that she may think he is afraid, and this he finds perhaps the most difficult to bear.

"She knows it is no fear withholds me; fear?
 "Of what? Suspense here is the terrible thing.
 "If she should, as she counts the minutes, come
 "On the fantastic notion that I fear
 "The world now, fear the Archbishop, fear perhaps
 "Count Guido, he who, having forged the lies,
 "May wait the work, attend the effect,—I fear
 "The sword of Guido! Let God see to that—
 "Hating lies, let not her believe a lie!"²

Thus he broods during the night. In the morning he determines to try to forget his thoughts in his work. He congratulates himself that he has at least saved her from the scandal that would have broken out on their flight. In the evening, however, the trouble returns, the suspense becomes too great. He represents to himself that his true duty as a priest is not completed in thus conquering self,

¹ G.C. 1017-25.

² G.C. 1040-8.

but that he is bound to go farther, bound to go and see her and counsel her to seek help from God himself and "above all, not despair", as there may be some other at hand free to render her the service she requires.

There she stood—leaned there, for the second time,
Over the terrace, looked at me, then spoke.¹

She sees at once in his face that he yearns to help her, that it is no weakness in courage that keeps him back, and she asks at once, when he neither grudges nor fears to do what she wishes, why nothing is done. As always the simple directness of Pompilia's words goes straight home. The sophistry with which he had blinded himself, the outcome of his attending to the letter, not the spirit, of his religion, shrivels up at once and he answers with equal directness:

"Lady, waste no thought, no word
"Even to forgive me! Care for what I care—
"Only! Now follow me as I were fate!
"Leave this house in the dark to-morrow night,
"Just before daybreak:—there's new moon this eve—
"It sets, and then begins the solid black.
"Descend, proceed to the Torrione, step
"Over the low dilapidated wall,
"Take San Clemente, there's no other gate
"Unguarded at the hour: some paces thence
"An inn stands; cross to it; I shall be there."

She answered, "If I can but find the way.
"But I shall find it. Go now!"²

Caponsacchi went straight to the inn, making sure that the route was quite practicable, and made arrangements with the innkeeper to have a carriage ready for him. He returned and found himself in his house for the last time. There lay the Summa opened as he had left it. He quietly closed it, feeling that God had spoken to him more directly through

¹ G.C. 1063-4.

² G.C. 1074-86.

Pompilia's mouth. Somehow the night passed away. In the morning his servant startled him by the remark "Sir, this eve—do you forget?" and then proceeded to point out that the next day was "St. George, the feast day, and moreover day for copes". Caponsacchi replied that he had to start for Rome that night, and told him to provide a laic dress for him with "a sword in case of accident". He could trust his servant. As he puts it—"I knew the knave, the knave knew me". So "through each familiar hindrance of the day" Caponsacchi passed, feeling

Time's old barrier-growth of right and fit
Give way through all its twines and let me go,¹

hardly conscious of the fact that his own will, bent steadily now on the journey to Rome, was the power to which everything yielded. At the darkest hour of the night just before the dawn he stood at the inn awaiting Pompilia.

Meanwhile what was Guido doing? Margherita had informed him at once of the message which Pompilia had given her, and we can imagine his joy at the first appearance of the success of his plot. We must believe then that he would redouble his watchfulness, not to hinder a meeting between his wife and Caponsacchi, but to hear their plans. That Pompilia should escape was now practically necessary for the success he aimed at, but it was likewise necessary that he should overtake her in her flight at some suitable point. It seems impossible then that the two meetings at the window could have taken place without his knowledge. The night of her escape Guido said to her:

"You, whom I loathe, beware you break my sleep
" 'This whole night! Couch beside me like the corpse
" 'I would you were!'"²

¹ G.C. 1127-8.

² P. 1479-81.

In the darkness of the night Pompilia arose, dressed, and found also

a trinket or two,
Belongings of her own in the old day.¹

Was Guido asleep? The speaker in *Other Half-Rome* puts it thus. She

Stole from the side o' the sleeping spouse—who knows?
Sleeping perhaps, silent for certain.²

She gained the street without hindrance and made her way to the inn. While Caponsacchi stood waiting for her, his whole being tense with expectation,

Began a whiteness in the distance, waxed
Whiter and whiter, near grew and more near,
Till it was she: there did Pompilia come:
The white I saw shine through her was her soul's,
Certainly, for the body was one black,
Black from head down to foot. She did not speak,
Glided into the carriage.³

Caponsacchi told the postilion to drive "as if the road burned underneath", "by San Spirito to Rome", that he would pay him to his heart's content, then leapt into the carriage beside her and the fateful journey began. The carriage swept away through the darkness while its two inmates sat silent. Pompilia's feelings we may imagine. Escaped from her husband, flying to Rome under the guidance of the one friend who had dared to help her in her misery, and whom she indeed loved though she knew it not, dreading pursuit and capture, we may guess how she passed the night. Caponsacchi on the other hand, fearing nothing, sat in a kind of rapture, hardly able to realize what had happened. At times he felt

¹ O.H.R. 1073-4.

² O.H.R. 1075-6.

³ G.C. 1139-45.

partly stupefied, "engulphed in the darkness". Then he would rouse himself

And be aware again, and see who sat
In the dark vest with the white face and hands.¹

In the early morning he found her gazing intently at him, and answered the question in her eyes, telling her they had passed Perugia, that opposite lay Assisi, and that they were now on holy ground. At the posthouse soon afterwards he left the carriage and brought her bread and wine, persuading her to eat by telling her that they had to stay until the horses were changed. Later in the day Pompilia, referring to the fact that the sudden cessation of pain in a diseased limb was no good sign, expressed her fear that this might be the case with her soul "whence all the pain is past at once". How like Pompilia are the words: "All pain must be to work some good in the end"; how like her trust in spite of all her suffering "that there's God, he reigns and rules out of this low world!" She added, however, that this peace might be the good resulting from the pain she had suffered. Again, still later, she asked Caponsacchi if he had a mother or a sister, and being answered in the negative, continued:

"Who was it—
"What woman were you used to serve this way,
"Be kind to, till I called you and you came?"
I did not like that word.²

Her question takes him back to his former life, the memory of which, in her presence, is peculiarly galling.

At evening they heard the Angelus, and Pompilia, turning to him, said:

"I told you I can neither read nor write.
"My life stopped with the play-time; I will learn,
"If I begin to live again,"³

¹ G.C. 1181-2.

² G.C. 1231-4.

³ G.C. 1267-9.

and asked him why he did not read the service at this hour.

I did not like that, neither, but I read,¹

said Caponsacchi, feeling that the performance of his sacred office brought home to him the impassable barriers between them. As the darkness closed in on them Pompilia felt herself back in Arezzo, with all its terrors. The daylight and the journey had seemed to carry her away from them, but as night fell her spirit sank. Caponsacchi, perceiving what was troubling her, as she afterwards says, or perhaps merely wishing to rouse her drooping spirits, remarked:

“ This grey place was famous once,”—
And he began that legend of the place
As if in answer to the unspoken fear,
And told me all about a brave man dead,
Which lifted me and let my soul go on! ²

When they reached Foligno it was dark. They stopped to change horses, and the postilion informed them that

“ This time to-morrow, may
“ Saints only help, relays continue good,
“ Nor robbers hinder, we arrive at Rome.” ³

Caponsacchi tried in vain to persuade her to take a short rest at the inn, declaring that they were “ out of harm’s reach, past pursuit ”. He did not know that Guido was close behind, biding his time. But Pompilia’s fear returned at once.

The misery grew again about her mouth,
The eyes burned up from faintness, like the fawn’s
Tired to death in the thicket, when she feels
The probing spear o’ the huntsman. “ Oh, no stay!”
She cried, in the fawn’s cry, “ On to Rome, on, on—
“ Unless ’t is you who fear, which cannot be!” ⁴

¹ G.C. 1274.

² P. 1538-42.

³ G.C. 1277-9.

⁴ G.C. 1285-90.

They went on all that night, but the strain began to tell upon her. She slept a restless, troubled sleep, and in her dreams was evidently once more in the presence of her husband.

Once, wide awake, she menaced, at arms' length
 Waved away something—"Never again with you!
 "My soul is mine, my body is my soul's:
 "You and I are divided ever more
 "In soul and body: get you gone!"¹

Caponsacchi in his anxiety to help her turns in despair to God, but it is with a heart full of shame at his own want of sincerity in the past. It is at this moment when he feels the need of prayer that he recognizes how half-hearted his religion has always been, and his words come like a cry wrung from his very heart:

"Why, in my whole life I have never prayed!
 "Oh, if the God, that only can, would help!
 "Am I his priest with power to cast out fiends?
 "Let God arise and all his enemies
 "Be scattered!" By morn, there was peace, no sigh
 Out of the deep sleep.²

When she awoke at last he answered at once the first questioning look, telling her to "bear up brave", that in twelve hours more they would reach Rome, "then no more of the terrible journey".

I have spoken of Caponsacchi's love for Pompilia. In her love for Caponsacchi there seems, as I have said, more of the divine than the human. She herself would have been the last to call it love, nor to the end can she understand why her friends persist in so naming it. The beauty of human love had been defiled for her and rendered a thing of loathing. Girolamo had loved her and could she then love Caponsacchi? Unconscious, therefore, of how her feeling towards him will be named, she shows in her words

¹ G.C. 1294-8.

² G.C. 1299-1304.

and actions an absolute trust in him, absolute content to be under his guidance, a perfect happiness and peace in his presence.

“ No more o’ the journey: if it might but last!
 “ Always, my life-long, thus to journey still!
 “ It is the interruption that I dread,—
 “ With no dread, ever to be here and thus!
 “ Never to see a face nor hear a voice!
 “ Yours is no voice; you speak when you are dumb;
 “ Nor face, I see it in the dark. I want
 “ No face nor voice that change and grow unkind.”
 That I liked, that was the best thing she said.¹

Caponsacchi adds: “ In the broad day-light ” as they drew near a town, “ the signs of life, house-roofs and the church tower ” recalled to Pompilia the cold, hard world she had escaped, and she shuddered as she fancied for the moment that the town might prove Arezzo and that her husband might be there ready to imprison her once more. Caponsacchi again, according to Pompilia, saw her trouble and guessed its source. At any rate he persuaded her to descend from the carriage at the post-house, and told the woman there,

“ It is my sister,—talk with her apart!
 “ She is married and unhappy, you perceive;
 “ I take her home because her head is hurt;
 “ Comfort her as you women understand!”²

He left them alone in the garden and paced up and down the road. Pompilia thus afterwards describes the incident:

Did not he find, bring, put into my arms
 A new-born babe?—and I saw faces beam
 Of the young mother proud to teach me joy,
 And gossips round expecting my surprise
 At the sudden hole through earth that lets in heaven.
 I could believe himself by his strong will

¹ G.C. 1311-9.

² G.C. 1323-6.

Had woven around me what I thought the world
 We went along in, every circumstance,
 Towns, flowers and faces, all things helped so well!
 For, through the journey, was it natural
 Such comfort should arise from first to last?
 As I look back, all is one milky way.¹

After half an hour or so Caponsacchi ordered the horses to be put in and came back to find her with the woman's babe in her arms. She smiled as he returned, telling him how much good this had done her, how it was better than "a whole night's rest", and that she was ready now to continue the journey. In the carriage she added that the woman feared it would take the whole day and perhaps half the next to reach Rome; and here we have again one of those unconscious expressions of her love and trust:

"I pray it finish since it cannot last:
 "There may be more misfortune at the close,
 "And where will you be? God suffice me then!"²

She then proceeded to ask whether, if she were surprised and killed on the journey, "a runaway from husband and his home", he would consider she died in sin, urging him "Now, be you candid and no priest but friend". Caponsacchi, relating the matter afterwards, says:

You must conceive my answer,—I forget—
 Taken up wholly with the thought, perhaps,
 This time she might have said,—might, did not say—
 "You are a priest." She said, "my friend".³

As the day passed, however, she grew once more restless and troubled, her eye seeming to see the foe he could not see, but who, though far beyond the reach of human vision, was really there on their track, waiting for the moment to spring. Then her mind began to wander and she addressed

¹ P. 1555-66.

² G.C. 1343-5.

³ G.C. 1380-3.

Caponsacchi by the name Gaetano, the name she afterwards gave to her babe.

I grew alarmed, my head seemed turning too.
 I quickened pace with promise now, now threat:
 Bade drive and drive, nor any stopping more.
 "Too deep i' the thick of the struggle, struggle through!
 "Then drench her in repose though death's self pour
 "The plenitude of quiet,—help us, God,
 "Whom the winds carry!"

Suddenly I saw
 The old tower, and the little white-walled clump
 Of buildings and the cypress-tree or two,—
 "Already Castelnuovo—Rome!" I cried,
 "As good as Rome,—Rome is the next stage, think!
 "This is where travellers' hearts are wont to beat.
 "Say you are saved, sweet lady!" Up she woke.
 The sky was fierce with colour from the sun
 Setting. She screamed out "No, I must not die!
 "Take me no farther, I should die: stay here!
 "I have more life to save than mine!"¹

She fell fainting into his arms, her last thought as she felt her strength failing, being:

"He will watch and care;
 "Let the strength go, I am content: he stays!"²

and with eyes gazing, as it were, their last on him she swooned away. And now for the first time he was troubled with a presentiment of coming evil.

We seemed safe; what was it foreboded so?³

He lifted her out of the carriage and carried her into the inn. He describes this incident later in words which express well the purity and pathos of his love:

¹ G.C. 1390-1407.

² P. 1574-5.

³ G.C. 1409.

I never touched her with my finger-tip
 Except to carry her to the couch, that eve,
 Against my heart, beneath my head, bowed low,
 As we priests carry the paten.¹

He

laid her on a couch, still calm and cured
 By deep sleep of all woes at once.²

The host urged him to pass the night there, assuring him that one night's repose would cure her. Caponsacchi was forced to acquiesce though he could not calm his fears. "Oh, my foreboding! But I could not choose." And he had reason to fear, for Guido, ever close behind, had at last got his opportunity.

He of course gives an entirely different version of the story, declaring that Pompilia, in order to ensure her escape, had drugged not only himself but his servants, and that it was the noon of the day after their flight before he could shake off sleep and pursue,

which means he took his time,
 Pressed on no more than lingered after, step
 By step, just making sure o' the fugitives,
 Till at the nick of time, he saw his chance,
 Seized it, came up with and surprised the pair.³

But why had he allowed them to go so far, to get so near Rome? His plot, as ever, wanted one thing for success—that they should pass a night at an inn on the road. Blind alike to the nobility of Caponsacchi and the purity of Pompilia, he expected that if they did so he would catch them in open sin. We can imagine, then, his rage and disappointment when, on inquiring at each inn, he got ever the same report, that the couple he sought had indeed been there, but had refused to stay or even leave the carriage,

¹ G.C. 1617-20.

² G.C. 1413-4.

³ O.H.R. 1210-4.

and seemed to count the minutes till they were off again. And now at the last stage before Rome Pompilia's strength fails and gives him his chance. One speaker paints him waiting patiently hour after hour till morning broke and then preparing to rush upon the pair, murder them in their guilt, and proclaim their infamy and his triumph to the world. Meanwhile Caponsacchi kept guard all night, "paced the passage", finding his fear grow till he was

Filled with a sense of such impending woe,
That, at first pause of night, pretence of gray,
I made my mind up it was morn.—"Reach Rome,
Lest hell reach her!"¹

He entered the court-yard, gave orders for the carriage, turned to re-enter the inn,

And there
Faced me Count Guido, there posed the mean man
As master,—took the field, encamped his rights,
Challenged the world.²

But in spite of his triumph Guido's disappointment was bitter, for, instead of finding, as he hoped, a helpless couple at his mercy, when he entered the courtyard there was the priest,

alert, calm, resolute and formidable,
Not the least look of fear in that broad brow—
One not to be disposed of by surprise,
And armed moreover—who had guessed as much?
Yes, there stood he in secular costume
Complete from head to heel, with sword at side,
He seemed to know the trick of perfectly.
There was no prompt suppression of the man
As he said calmly "I have saved your wife
"From death; there was no other way but this;
"Of what do I defraud you except death?
"Charge any wrong beyond, I answer it."³

¹ G.C. 1423-6.

² G.C. 1433-6.

³ O.H.R. 1255-66.

It will be interesting to read along with this quotation the Pope's short summary of the meeting in the court-yard:

See how the strong aggressor, bad and bold,
With every vantage, preconcerts surprise,
Leaps of a sudden at his victim's throat
In a byeway,—how fares he when face to face
With Caponsacchi? Who fights, who fears now?
There quails Count Guido armed to the chattering teeth,
Cowers at the steadfast eye and quiet word
O' the Canon of the Pieve! There skulks crime
Behind law called in to back cowardice.¹

Caponsacchi notes that, while Guido speaks,

Oh, how he kept
Well out o' the way, at arm's length and to spare!²

His speech to Caponsacchi is of course one long lie and insult. He finishes by declaring to the officers of the law, whom he has called in to his aid, that this is the lover disguised, that as he is a priest he refrains from drawing his sword on him, and orders them to arrest him. To Caponsacchi it seems that all must see, as he does, through the veil of lies and infamy behind which Guido shelters himself. He waits, hoping that Guido will proceed and make it still clearer, and so before he can do or say anything he is arrested. But when Guido adds "and now catch her" he awakes to the true state of affairs, and demands that, as he is a priest and privileged, they should let him lead the way "to the lady's chamber". He adds that, as they are officers of the law, he presumes they are "familiar with the guise of guilt", and tells them to detect

"Guilt on her face when it meets mine, then judge
"Between us and the mad dog howling there!"³

They went up and broke into the chamber, and here a

¹ *Pope*, 690-8.

² *G.C.* 1440-1.

³ *G.C.* 1512-3.

new disappointment awaited Guido. Accustomed to Pompilia's absolute submission and obedience, he expected her to cower at once at his word and leave him here at least triumphant before the crowd. But no! at his voice she awoke and sprang to her feet, facing him. He retreated before her and stood "buttressed there by the window" through which the sunlight streamed.

"Away from between me and hell!" she cried:

"Hell for me, no embracing any more!

"I am God's, I love God, God—whose knees I clasp,

"Whose utterly most just award I take,

"But bear no more love-making devils: hence!"¹

At this moment she noticed Caponsacchi held fast:

"Ha!—and him

"Also you outrage? Him, too, my sole friend,

"Guardian and saviour? That I baulk you of,

"Since—see how God can help at last and worst!"²

She leapt at the sword hanging at Guido's side, tore it from the sheath, brandished it gleaming in the sunlight. "Die", cried she, "devil, in God's name", but before she could strike the crowd had interposed and Guido was saved.

Astonishment and fear at first almost struck him dumb. Is it any wonder? Pompilia, as she stood facing him, the tall, graceful form, the white face with its crown of black hair, the sunlight gleaming on his sword as she raised it to strike, and lighting up the divine indignation that blazed in her deep, dark eyes, must have appeared more terrible to him at that moment than he and his four ruffians did to her on the night of her murder. Is it to be wondered at that Guido Franceschini should shrink and cower before her, that fear should strike him dumb, when

¹ G.C. 1528-32.

² G.C. 1540-3.

the poor worm he had trampled on so often turned on him, a thing of terror, and leapt at him like a serpent? Once more was Guido baulked of his triumph. The very people called in to his aid turned against him and showed plainly their admiration for Pompilia and their sympathy with her. Guido himself confesses that her action "did the proper service with the mob"; that her words which, as Caponsacchi says, "sufficed to spike the coward through and through", were heard

with proper clappings and applause
From the audience that enjoys the bold and free.¹

Finally, however, he began to gather his courage again, and, as no one could deny that the law at least seemed to be on his side, he ordered them to be carried to prison, adding that he would look for various "stolen effects" and "amorous pieces, verse and prose", which he declared he expected to find. But here again Caponsacchi interposed with the words, "What I say, slight at your peril". He pointed out that he and Guido were aliens, that they were both noble by birth, but he was the nobler and bore "a name men know", that he was in addition a priest; and finished with the words,

" I demand that the church I serve, decide
" Between us, right the slandered lady there.
" A Tuscan noble, I might claim the Duke:
" A priest, I rather choose the church,—bid Rome
" Cover the wronged with her inviolate shield." ²

This could not be refused, and so they were borne off "to separate cells o' the same ignoble prison, and separate thence to Rome". Caponsacchi was never to see her again. Eight months later at the second trial, while Pompilia is

¹ *G.G.F.* 1130-1.

² *G.C.* 1580-4.

“bleeding out her life” at St. Anna’s hospital, he says of this separation at Castelnuevo:

Pompilia’s face, then and thus, looked on me
The last time in this life: not one sight since,
Never another sight to be!¹

In due course the case came before the court at Rome. Some eight months later this same court will try Guido for the murder of Pompilia and those called her parents, and at that time they will reconsider the present case in the glare of the new light cast upon it. They will then perceive the terrible nature of the question before them, but at this time they look upon it as a comedy and with difficulty maintain their gravity while they examine Caponsacchi, whom they regard as the courtly handsome young lover.

There was the blameless shrug, permissible smirk,
The pen’s pretence at play with the pursed mouth,
The titter stifled in the hollow palm
Which rubbed the eyebrow and caressed the nose.²

Nor was Caponsacchi at his ease before them. Conscious as he was of his own innocence and of the change in his life, he knew that he loved Pompilia, and though his love differed not only in degree but in kind from that imputed to him by the judges, still this and the memory of the life he had led in Arezzo pressed heavily on him, leaving him unable to meet the accusing mirth of

Tommati, Venturini and the rest
Who . . . scarce repressed the smile,
Forewent the wink: waived recognition so
Of peccadillos incident to youth,
Especially youth high-born.³

He saw clearly the view the judges took of his character,

¹ *G.C.* 1588-90.

² *G.C.* 14-17.

³ *R. and B.* 1052-6.

and could not help feeling that his life apparently justified this view. True, he had changed, but what could he say when his action was judged not in the light of this change, for which his judges had only his word, but in the light of the life he had led before the advent of Pompilia, for which they had abundant proof. Thus he

Cut the conscious figure of a fool,
Changed countenance, dropped bashful gaze to ground,
While hesitating for an answer then.¹

Eight months later he will stand before these same judges telling the same tale, but then, a passionate, tragic, terrible figure, he will tear to shreds the veil of lies and prejudice which blinds them, and move them to terror and to tears. We have little record of this trial. We know that Caponsacchi and Pompilia after being heard were confronted with the letters, that Caponsacchi showed easily enough that though he had written letters, these produced were not by him, while as for Pompilia, she could neither read nor write. The trick of the first famous letter to Paolo was now manifest. Margherita on being examined declared that she had carried letters between the two, and that Caponsacchi had paid frequent nocturnal visits to the house, but her tales were judged in the light of her character. "Borsi called Venerino", the driver for the first night, deposed to their "kissings in the coach, frequent, frenetic", but he did so only, as Caponsacchi points out, "after some weeks of sharp imprisonment". Caponsacchi, despising the blindness of his judges, closes his speech in his own defence with these words:

"Sirs, give what credit to the lie you can!
"For me, no word in my defence I speak,
"And God shall argue for the lady!"²

He thus afterwards describes his trial:

¹ *R. and B.* 1064-6.

² *G.C.* 1704-6.

So
 Did I stand question, and make answer, still
 With the same result of smiling disbelief,
 Polite impossibility of faith
 In such affected virtue in a priest.¹

The court, as in the case for the dowry, tried to take a middle course. Their decision, which cast a certain shade upon all the parties engaged, was that there had been "undoubtedly some toying with the wife", but as for the rest of Guido's accusations, poisoning, robbing, and the rest, they were false.

Your apprehension was—of guilt enough
 To be compatible with innocence,
 So, punished best a little and not too much.²

Caponsacchi, for being caught in a laic dress, in flight with Guido's wife, was "relegated, not imprisoned",

" Sent for three years to clarify his youth
 " At Civita, a rest by the way to Rome." ³

Pompilia, as she declared her only wish was to be freed from her husband, was granted this, but was confined to a convent in Rome, the Convent of Convertites,— "Those sinners saved, those Magdalens re-made". As for Guido, he was told that these sentences on the guilty ought to satisfy him.

Thus did the world judge the spirit, thus did its "coarse thumb and finger fail to plumb" the depths, thus did the Church decide that Caponsacchi, for daring once to be a hero and do his duty, should be let off lightly.

¹ G.C. 1707-11.

² G.C. 1735-7.

³ O.H.R. 1412-3.

V

According to the speaker in *Other Half-Rome*, Guido retires to Arezzo before the trial, leaving Paolo to manage the case; but he himself leads us to believe that he was in Rome until the decision of the court was given. The point is of little importance. His return journey at any rate was the reverse of the triumph he had expected. He came back beaten, an acknowledged coward who had shrunk from crossing swords with a priest. His wife had escaped from his clutches and her flight was on the whole justified by the decision of the court. Caponsacchi was looked upon as the gallant, handsome young lover, and Guido had to meet the grin of the world at his defeat. But worse than all to him must have been the total collapse of his long prepared scheme. His only consolation, if consolation it can be called, was the sentence upon Caponsacchi and Pompilia. This he made the most of, but we can imagine it brought him little comfort.

Guido had gained not one of the good things
He grasped at by his creditable plan
O' the flight and following and the rest: the suit
That smouldered late was fanned to fury new,
This adjunct came to help with fiercer fire,
While he had got himself a quite new plague—
Found the world's face an universal grin
At this last best of the Hundred Merry Tales.¹

In addition Pietro and Violante were once more in arms

¹ *O.H.R.* 1439-46.

against him, and the next thing we hear is a demand on Pompilia's part for divorce from Guido, "on plea of cruelty and risk of life", and a claim for "restitution of the dowry paid" and "immunity from paying any more". This suit also, backed by the exposures at the recent trial, seemed likely to prosper. To meet these, Paolo on Guido's behalf brought in a counter plea for divorce from Pompilia on account of infidelity to her husband. If this suit had been successful the dowry would of course have gone to Guido. The recent decision of the court helped him much, as, light though the punishment was, it implied a certain degree of guilt in both Pompilia and Caponsacchi; for if they were innocent, why were they both in confinement? and Paolo, "who knew his Rome, what wheels to set to work", brought all the influence he could to bear on the case. He went beyond this indeed and appealed to the Pope to settle the question, Guido having, as we have said, taken some of the minor orders of the church. The Pope, however, refused to interfere, and so the whole three suits dragged on until they were cut short by Guido's final action. Meanwhile, according to the simple statement in *Other Half-Rome*,

"Five months had passed now since Pompilia's flight,
Months spent in peace among the Convent Nuns."¹

This, of course, was at Guido's expense, and we can imagine how in his greed he hated this tax upon him. But now the heads of the Convent came forward with a proposal. Pompilia's health, they declared, was declining fast, due to the confinement in the Convent, and they asked that she should be allowed to return to the house of Pietro and Violante, who would then of course bear the expense of her upkeep and so relieve the husband, and that

¹ O.H.R. 1490-1.

their house should then be considered her prison, *Domus pro carcere*. All seemed satisfactory and the agreement was made. Thus Pompilia returned to those she had always called her parents, to live with them in their quiet villa in the Pauline district, and there on her return, locked in Violante's arms, both of them "cried all the cares away". In this house two months later, about the nineteenth of December, Pompilia gave birth to a child, a boy, whom she named Gaetano. Her reasons for choosing this name she gives herself:

Something put it in my head
To call the boy "Gaetano"—no old name
For sorrow's sake; I looked up to the sky
And took a new saint to begin anew.
One who has only been made saint—how long?
Twenty-five years: so, carefuller, perhaps,
To guard a namesake than those old saints grow,
Tired out by this time,—see my own five saints! ¹

As she declares on her death-bed, her life has been a strange one, and to her utterly inexplicable in its changes. Pietro and Violante, with whom she had lived so happily in her childhood, had declared themselves no longer her parents. Husbands, she thought, would

love their wives,
Guard them and guide them, give them happiness, ²

but Guido, immediately after the marriage,

Not waiting for a moment, changed
Into a fury of fire, if once he was
Merely a man: his face threw fire at mine. ³

Caponsacchi, whom she regarded as her one true friend, and whose intercourse with her had been so pure, so absolutely free from all that she had been taught by Girolamo's

¹ P. 100-7.

² P. 152-3.

³ G.C. 773-5.

words and actions to connect with the name of lover,—Caponsacchi, she found, was regarded even by her friends as her lover, and for this and for aiding her in her flight he was punished. This to her was the greatest surprise of all. And now comes one more change, one more trial for the young mother.

Even to my babe! I thought, when he was born,
Something began for once that would not end,
Nor change into a laugh at me, but stay
For evermore, eternally quite mine.
Well, so he is,—but yet they bore him off,
The third day, lest my husband should lay traps
And catch him, and by means of him catch me.¹

How keenly Pompilia felt this separation from her babe the third day after his birth we can well imagine, but how needful it was that the child should be hidden away is evident from the fact that on that very day, as far as we can see, Guido must have set out for Rome on his last scheme of vengeance. He had received the news at Arezzo and at once saw his opportunity. So long as there was the chance of his gaining Pompilia's dowry, and the wealth of Pietro and Violante, the lives of these three were sacred to him. To strike at one of them meant to lose all he held most dear. Greed, as the Pope says, ruled in his heart and vengeance had to wait. But the birth of the child changed all. His child was now heir to all he could hope to get from them, and so the opportunity had come of glutting his vengeance without in any way damaging his rights. Once the child was in his power his rights were secure, and so he determined to crush once for all the three he hated, and show to the world yet his triumph and their fall. How well the story would tell at Arezzo too, how, having appealed to Rome for justice and having

¹ P. 202-8.

been refused, he finally took the affair into his own hands, as a strong man should, and by their deaths wiped away all the stains they had cast on his name! He had good reason to believe that once back in Arezzo he would not only be safe but would gain the approbation of the court. When the case for the flight of Pompilia was being tried in Rome, Guido had brought the same case before the Tuscan courts at Arezzo, only, as Caponsacchi points out and he himself practically confesses,

There are two tales to suit the separate courts,
Arezzo and Rome: he tells you here, we fled
Alone, unhelped,—lays stress on the main fault,
The spiritual sin, Rome looks to: but elsewhere
He likes best we should break in, steal, bear off,
Be fit to brand and pillory and flog—
That 's the charge goes to the heart of the Governor.¹

In Arezzo, therefore, Pompilia was accused of drugging Guido and his whole household, and with the help of Guillichini,² for she seemed incapable of doing it all alone, of robbing Guido and flying to Rome in the company of a priest. There, we may be sure, where there was no one to show their falsity, much would be made of the forged letters and of Margherita's tales, much too of that first prophetic letter to Paolo. The court decided entirely in Guido's favour, condemned Guillichini to the galleys and Pompilia to imprisonment for life in the Stinche, while even the driver of the carriage on the first night was confined to prison for some weeks for his assistance in the flight it was said, but really, we may guess, to force him to make the accusations against Pompilia and Caponsacchi which he afterwards did make. This sentence was signed and sealed by the Granduke. What then had Guido to fear? Once the murder was committed he had but to

¹ *G.C.* 2043-9.

² See p. 38.

escape across the Tuscan frontier, about four or five hours' ride from Rome, and he was safe, could

laugh at-home,
Light-hearted with his fellows of the place,—
Prepared by that strange shameful judgment, that
Satire upon a sentence just pronounced
By the Rota and confirmed by the Granduke,—
Ready in a circle to receive their peer,
Appreciate his good story how, when Rome,
The Pope-King and the populace of priests
Made common cause with their confederate
The other priestling who seduced his wife,
He, all unaided, wiped out the affront
With decent bloodshed and could face his friends,
Frolic it in the world's eye.¹

Already he had had a foretaste of vengeance. Canon Conti had appeared in the trial at Rome and had told the truth. Shortly before the birth of Pompilia's child Conti died, poisoned, we are told, by Guido. Now he prepared himself for the final deed. He selected from the peasants who worked at his villa at Vittiano four men, all young, none of them being over twenty. They readily agreed, on his promising a reward, to aid him in his enterprise. At Rome, the first sign of what was coming was the sudden disappearance of Paolo. Knowing, as one speaker leads us to believe, or suspecting his brother's intention, he fled that he might not be implicated in the crime, and so he passes out of the story; we hear no more of him. On Christmas Eve, when Rome rang with the yearly celebration of the promise "Peace on earth, goodwill towards men", the murderers arrived and took up their abode in Paolo's vacant house. Slowly and carefully did Guido make his preparations, and nine days later, on the second day of the New Year, all was ready. Even the kind of

¹ *Pope*, 832-44.

weapon he was to use had been chosen carefully, that each stab might give the maximum of pain and be the more deadly. It was the Genoese dagger, "triangular i' the blade, with little hook teeth on the edge", which, when the dagger is withdrawn, "open in the flesh" and leave a ragged wound.

Meanwhile Pompilia was recovering her strength after the birth of her child. On New Year's day,

Violante, Pietro, each had given the arm
I leant on, to walk by, from couch to chair
And fireside,¹

and round the fire they had talked over their own prospects and the future of her child.

Oh what a happy friendly eve was that! ²

The next day Pietro "was so happy and would talk so much", that "about noon" Violante persuaded him to go to see the various churches in their festal decorations and bring them back "the news by supper-time". When he returned late, the five murderers had already found their way across the town, "by blind cuts and black turns", and were not far from the "little lone suburban villa".

It was eve,
The second of the year, and oh so cold!
Ever and anon there flittered through the air
A snow-flake, and a scanty couch of snow
Crusted the grass-walk and the garden-mould.
All was grave, silent, sinister,—when, ha?
Glimmeringly did a pack of were-wolves pad
The snow, those flames were Guido's eyes in front,
And all five found and footed it, the track,
To where a threshold-streak of warmth and light
Betrayed the villa-door with life inside,
While an inch outside were those blood-bright eyes.³

¹ P. 223-5.

² P. 249.

³ R. and B. 605-16.

With his hand on the latch Guido paused to breathe. Just as he was about to knock it flashed through his mind that here at last might appear the hitch to spoil his scheme, successful so far. Warned by his former failures, what was it he feared? Just that the house might contain less or more than the three he wished to catch, that Pietro or Violante might be absent, or that two or three neighbours might be within, that he might "chance on six" instead of the three he sought. Meanwhile Pietro within was telling how he had seen all the seven churches and found San Giovanni most to his mind, for

" There 's the fold,
 " And all the sheep together, big as cats!
 " And such a shepherd, half the size of life,
 " Starts up and hears the angel,"¹

when there was a tap at the door. They started up, and Violante going to the door asked who was there. The answer came, "Open to Caponsacchi". Pompilia's heart thrilled at the name. Violante cheerfully threw wide the door. Guido at once struck her down and the five rushed in. A few minutes and it was all over. Guido himself gives the following dramatic description of Pietro's death:

So Pietro,—when I chased him here and there,
 Morsel by morsel cut away the life
 I loathed,—cried for just respite to confess
 And save his soul: much respite did I grant!²

While, according to the speaker in *Tertium Quid*, Pompilia was the last to fall:

Guido's, this last husband's-act.
 He lifts her by the long dishevelled hair,
 Holds her away at arm's length with one hand,
 While the other tries if life come from the mouth—

¹ P. 263-6.

² G. 471-4.

Looks out his whole heart's hate on the shut eyes,
 Draws a deep satisfied breath, "So—dead at last!"
 Throws down the burden on dead Pietro's knees,
 And ends all with "Let us away, my boys!"¹

Guido himself, in his last great speech, the night before his execution, tells us plainly what he felt as he looked at the three bodies.

Henceforth

I might thrive: these were drawn and dead and damned.
 Oh Cardinal, the deep long sigh you heave
 When the load 's off you, ringing as it runs
 All the way down the serpent-stair to hell!
 No doubt the fine delirium flustered me,
 Turned my brain with the influx of success
 As if the sole need now were to wave wand
 And find doors fly wide,—wish and have my will,—
 The rest o' the scheme would care for itself: escape
 Easy enough were that, and poor beside!
 It all but proved so,—ought to quite have proved,
 Since, half the chances had sufficed, set free
 Anyone, with his senses at command,
 From thrice the danger of my flight. But, drunk,
 Redundantly triumphant,—some reverse
 Was sure to follow!²

The screams of the three had aroused the neighbours, and as the murderers rushed off they appeared upon the scene.

Soon followed the Public Force; pursuit began
 Though Guido had the start and chose the road.³

And now at last comes the reverse which trips up Guido and his accomplices. It was a matter of common knowledge at Rome that anyone who wished to get horses at a post-house to leave the city had first to get a warrant, "with the due seal and sign of Rome's Police". But this anyone could obtain; as the Pope says,

¹ T.Q. 1384-91.

² G. 1609-25.

³ T.Q. 1395-6.

Why, the first urchin tells you, to leave Rome,
Get horses, you must show the warrant, just
The banal scrap, clerk's scribble, a fair word buys,
Or foul one, if a ducat sweeten word,—
And straight authority will back demand,
Give you the pick o' the post-house! ¹

Guido, who had lived thirty years in Rome, forgot just this little slip of paper which would have made his plans complete. He declares himself that a ducat slipped into the post-master's hand

while you whisper him—
How you the Count and certain four your knaves,
Have just been mauling who was malapert,
Suspect the kindred may prove troublesome,
Therefore, want horses in a hurry,—that
And nothing more secures you any day
The pick o' the stable! ²

Guido and his four followers arrived at the post-house and he asked for horses, tried to bribe the post-master with gold, told him he was a duke and that the man they had murdered was only a Jew, and found he was dealing, as he puts it, "with the one scrupulous fellow in all Rome". The post-master, seeing that Guido's hat and sword were gone and that he was splashed with blood, refused the gold, and asked for the warrant, the mere slip of paper he could have had for the asking a few hours before. Guido told him he had lost it. "Get another, or no horses hence", replied the post-master.

Thus, though he feared to stop the grim blood-stained five, he forced them to attempt their escape on foot, while the pursuers were already on their track. Knowing their danger they made a desperate effort to reach the Tuscan frontier. They took the road "tired and footsore, those blood-flustered five", and pressed forward desperately

¹ Pope, 819-24.

² G. 1629-35.

through the darkness and the cold until, after accomplishing about twenty miles, overcome with fatigue, they stumbled into a grange and falling upon the straw slept where they fell. The pursuers, close upon their track, soon came up and found them "red from head to heel":

Each wrapped in bloody cloak, each grasping still
His unwiped weapon, sleeping all the same
The sleep o' the just.¹

They were roused, bound, mounted on horseback, and conducted back to Rome. On the road Guido discovered one more failure in his plot, a failure of which he saw at once the terrible consequences. He asked his conductors how they knew it was he who committed the murder, since he was then supposed to be in Arezzo. Who was it then that told them? "Why, naturally, your wife," came the reply, and Guido, struck to the heart with fear and astonishment at Pompilia's being still alive, dropped from his horse, and for the rest of the road had to be supported on each side. When a young man, Guido, by the advice of one of his fencing masters, had studied anatomy, in order to know well the vital points in the human frame. Commenting later on the strangeness of Pompilia's temporary recovery, he says that on being haled back to Rome,

whom find I
Here, still to fight with, but my pale frail wife?
—Riddled with wounds by one not like to waste
The blows he dealt,—knowing anatomy,—
(I think I told you) bound to pick and choose
The vital parts! 'T was learning all in vain!²

Little as he knew it at the time, however, his own greed had doomed him to failure. Had everything else gone well, he had prepared one final trap for himself which there was

¹ *T.Q.* 1401-3.

² *G.* 1676-81.

little chance of his escaping. He had promised to pay his four accomplices for their help, but the deed being done, his natural greed asserted itself, and at the time he said nothing about pay. But they knew well that once back in Tuscany he might refuse to pay them, and that there they would have no means of enforcing their demands. So, when they found Guido so anxious to get over the frontier and so silent regarding their reward, they plotted among themselves, as they afterwards confessed on the rack, to murder and rob him the next morning. The Pope, about to doom him to death, says, concerning this,

So, to the last, greed found itself at odds
With craft in thee, and, proving conqueror,
Had sent thee, the same night that crowned thy hope,
Thither where, this same day, I see thee not,
Nor, through God's mercy, need, to-morrow, see.¹

Guido heard of this plot afterwards when he was in prison, and his last word on the subject is characteristic of the man.

Well, being the arch-offender, I die last,—
May, ere my head falls, have my eyesight free,
Nor miss them dangling high on either hand,
Like scarecrows in a hemp-field, for their pains!²

Thus then the five were captured, brought back to Rome, and thrown into prison, and next day Rome was presented with the spectacle described in the first chapter.

¹ *Pope*, 864-8.

² *G.* 1750-3.

VI

COUNT GUIDO FRANCESCHINI

The names of Pietro, Violante, Pompilia, and Guido were well known in Rome. When we remember their long residence in that city, and the events of the four years after the marriage, the return of the Comparini to Rome, their publication of the facts concerning Pompilia's birth, and the tales of Guido's poverty and cruelty, the suit for the recovery of the dowry, Pompilia's escape three years later and flight with Caponsacchi, followed by their sensational capture and trial, and the plea and counter-plea for divorce, we can understand why the murder, followed by the capture of Guido, caused such excitement in Rome. It was like the last act of a tragedy in real life which had been played before their eyes.

According to the custom of the time the five murderers, soon after their capture, are put to the torture to enforce complete confession. The popular belief was that the nobility were exempt from this and that Guido would escape torture; but it was not so. The lawyer who defends him declares:

One may dispute,—as I am bound to do,
And shall,—validity of process here:
Inasmuch as a noble is exempt
From torture which plebeians undergo
In such a case: for law is lenient, lax,
Remits the torture to a nobleman
Unless suspicion be of twice the strength
Attaches to a man born vulgarly;¹

¹ *H.A.* 316-23.

but he adds later:

I wonder, all the same,
Not so much at these peasants' lack of heart;
But—Guido Franceschini, nobleman,
Bear pain no better! ¹

How terrible the torture really was, we may judge from the following remarks by the same speaker:

In unwary hands,
Death on the spot is no rare consequence:
As indeed all but happened in this case
To one of ourselves, our young tough peasant-friend
The accomplice called Baldeschi: they were rough,
Dosed him with torture as you drench a horse,
Not modify your treatment to a man:
So, two successive days he fainted dead,
And only on the third essay, gave up,
Confessed like flesh and blood.²

As usual, the rack extorts full confession, and on the fourth day after the murder Guido is brought before his judges, that he may, if he can, explain and extenuate the deed he has confessed. Needless to say he represents himself as a much wronged man. He confesses boldly his share in the murder—he could do no less having been caught red-handed; but he attempts to represent it as the natural and justifiable outcome of years of suffering on his part and that of his family, of years of deception and calumny on the part of Pietro and Violante, and of the open and confessed guilt of Pompilia. His speech is a masterpiece of special pleading in which he manages, except at intervals, to hide his true nature. The reader who knows the facts of the story sees at once, of course, how utterly false is Guido's representation of them; but were the reader quite unaware of the facts of the story,

¹ *H.A.* 404-7.

² *H.A.* 345-54.

had he nothing but this speech to go by, it would still fail to convince. An analysis of the speech reveals at once the fact that Guido, according as it suits him, bases his argument now on the Christianity of the time, now on the laws of the market, and now on an utterly false deduction from facts which are granted.

His judges, who have known him during his residence in Rome, naturally show some signs of sympathy, as this man of their own rank, this nobleman, is helped into their presence, unable to walk from the effects of the rack. Seeing his chance, Guido begins at once, deprecating their being troubled on his behalf:

Come, you take to heart
An ordinary matter. Law is law.
Noblemen were exempt, the vulgar thought,
From racking; but, since law thinks otherwise,
I have been put to the rack.¹

He then thanks them for the torture, adding that he can well understand how the court may fail to perceive that this mere bodily pain is almost a pleasure, after the four years' torture of the heart he has gone through since his marriage.

Four years have I been operated on
I' the soul, do you see—its tense or tremulous part—
My self-respect, my care for a good name,
Pride in an old one, love of kindred—just
A mother, brothers, sisters, and the like,
That looked up to my face when days were dim,
And fancied they found light there—no one spot,
Foppishly sensitive, but has paid its pang;²

so that even though the case should go against him, "mere hanging, heading" would be tenderness itself in comparison with the

¹ *C.G.F.* 10-16.

² *C.G.F.* 29-36.

Demonstration public and precise
 That I, having married the mongrel of a drab,
 Am bound to grant that mongrel-brat, my wife,
 Her mother's birthright-license as is just,—
 Let her sleep undisturbed, i' the family style,
 Her sleep out in the embraces of a priest,
 Nor disallow their bastard as my heir.¹

He proceeds to state simply:

I killed Pompilia Franceschini, Sirs;
 Killed too the Comparini, husband, wife,
 Who called themselves, by a notorious lie,
 Her father and her mother to ruin me;²

and, adding that he supposes what they want is an explanation of the deed, finishes his introductory remarks with "Now, for truth". He asks them to weigh well the fact that all his trouble has come to him from his devoting his life to the service of the Church.

Noble, I recognized my nobler still,
 The Church, my suzerain; no mock mistress, she;
 The secular owned the spiritual.³

He proceeds to tell the story of his house, their noble descent, the decline of their fortunes till

none o' the line
 Having a single gift beyond brave blood,
 Or able to do aught but give, give, give
 In blood and brain, in house and land and cash,
 Not get and garner as the vulgar may,
 We became poor as Francis or our Lord.⁴

He then gives the story of his life, his thirty years in Rome, his failure to get promotion and his final decision to go home, give up hoping, and be content with being only a nobleman, the descendant of a great house. All this he

¹ C.G.F. 87-93.
 (D 435)

² C.G.F. 109-12.

³ C.G.F. 128-30.

⁴ C.G.F. 159-64.
 8

tells with now a compliment to this judge, now one to that, here a criticism upon life showing his knowledge of its low, mean side, there almost an outburst of fury as he describes the plebeians who have passed him in the race for fortune. His marriage he describes as simply a barter of rank for wealth. He adopts here quite frankly what I have called the law of the market as the basis of his argument, and asks them what they have to say against his buying of "flesh and blood". Has rank any value? he asks. If not, society as then constituted must go to the ground.

Honour of birth,—

If that thing has no value, cannot buy
 Something with value of another sort,
 You 've no reward nor punishment to give
 I' the giving or the taking honour.¹

What then is its value, he continues, if not just its worth in the market, and did he not attempt merely to get this very value, sell his rank for wealth? He allows that in making the bargain both sides may have spoken more than the truth, that he may have made himself out to be richer than he was, while they pretended that their origin was not so low as it seemed. But as, in reality, he sought only their wealth and they his rank, both recognized "where the backbone lurked i' the writhings of the bargain". Here the real Guido speaks, but note how he shifts his base as he proceeds. We naturally expect that having carried out this commercial transaction he will profess himself contented with having obtained the wealth. But no; he expects more. He expects from his purchased wife all that Christian marriage based on love could give:

Loyalty and obedience,—wish and will
 To settle and suit her fresh and plastic mind

¹ *C.G.F.* 439-43.

To the novel, not disadvantageous mould!
 Father and mother shall the woman leave,
 Cleave to the husband, be it for weal or woe:
 There is the law: what sets this law aside
 In my particular case? ¹

He does not or will not see that he himself has set it aside. Friends, he said, had pointed out the disparity in their ages and the unlikelihood of such a mere girl as Pompilia being able to take her place as his wife, but he would

still think nobler of the sex,
 Believe a woman still may take a man
 For the short period that his soul wears flesh,
 And, for the soul's sake, understand the fault
 Of armour frayed by fighting. ²

Very true! But surely we cannot expect to buy this in the market. In short, he sums up thus his expectations:

With a wife I look to find all wifeliness,
 As when I buy, timber and twig, a tree—
 I buy the song o' the nightingale inside. ³

But what if the nightingale, which has been no partner in the bargain, should choose to fly away! Is the bargain then annulled? Thus, however, he continues:

Such was the pact: Pompilia from the first
 Broke it, refused from the beginning day
 Either in body or soul to cleave to mine,
 And published it forthwith to all the world. ⁴

But from his own words we learn that Pompilia had no hand in the bargain, that she was sold like a chattel. How then could she break the pact as he calls it? Still later, as he gives his version of the behaviour of Pietro and Violante during their four months' stay at Arezzo, he complains

¹ *C.G.F.* 578-84.

² *C.G.F.* 598-602.

³ *C.G.F.* 604-6.

⁴ *C.G.F.* 607-10.

that Pompilia made common cause with them, and asks if it is any wonder he grew harsh with her.

She married: what was it she married for,
 Counted upon and meant to meet thereby?
 "Love" suggests some one, "Love, a little word
 "Whereof we have not heard one syllable."¹

I might point out here that I can find in Guido no trace of love for anyone but himself, that his last great speech in which he lays his heart bare to us shows how absolutely wanting he is in this—the noblest of all human passions. He seems indeed quite unable to understand it. He continues that love with all its accompaniments would be

Clearly claimable

When the fit price is paid the proper way.
 Had it been some friend's wife, now, threw her fan
 At my foot, with just this pretty scrap attached,
 "Shame, death, damnation—fall these as they may,
 "So I find you, for a minute! Come this eve!"
 —Why, at such sweet self-sacrifice,—who knows?
 I might have fired up, found me at my post,
 Ardent from head to heel, nor feared catch cough.
 Nay, had some other friend's . . . say, daughter, tripped
 Upstairs and tumbled flat and frank on me,
 Bareheaded and barefooted, with loose hair
 And garments all at large,—cried "Take me thus!
 "Duke So-and-So, the greatest man in Rome—
 "To escape his hand and heart have I broke bounds,
 "Traversed the town and reached you!"—then, indeed,
 The lady had not reached a man of ice!
 I would have rummaged, ransacked at the word
 Those old odd corners of an empty heart
 For remnants of dim love the long disused,
 And dusty crumbings of romance! But here,
 We talk of just a marriage, if you please—
 The every-day conditions and no more;
 Where do these bind me to bestow one drop
 Of blood shall dye my wife's true-love-knot pink?

¹ *C.G.F.* 665-8.

Pompilia was no pigeon, Venus' pet,
 That shuffled from between her pressing paps
 To sit on my rough shoulder,—but a hawk,
 I bought at a hawk's price and carried home
 To do hawk's service.¹

And so he uses as an illustration of his treatment of Pompilia the method used in training hawks.

I have paid my pound, await my penny's worth,
 So, hoodwink, starve and properly train my bird,
 And, should she prove a haggard,—twist her neck! ²

His short summary of the duties of marriage is worthy of note:

The obligation I incurred was just
 To practise mastery, prove my mastership:—
 Pompilia's duty was—submit herself,
 Afford me pleasure, perhaps cure my bile.
 Am I to teach my lords what marriage means,
 What God ordains thereby and man fulfils
 Who, docile to the dictate, treads the house? ³

He refers to the manner in which the Church treats a monk who, having taken the vows, begins to rebel at the severity of the discipline, and adds "This I take to be the Church's mode and mine".

When he retails the story of Pompilia's letter to Paolo he sees at once that his judges know the truth of the matter and attempts rather cleverly to justify his action. What if he made Pompilia write what she had written, he asks, what if she but inked his pencilled letters? Were not the sentiments of the letter correct? Were they not what a wife in her position ought to have written? A child cannot answer for itself at baptism and so another speaks for it, puts in the proper word; thus he did for Pompilia. He does not add that Pompilia could neither read nor write—he could

¹ C.G.F. 676-705.

² C.G.F. 708-10.

³ C.G.F. 716-22.

not do so without confessing the falsity of the letters he afterwards imputed to Caponsacchi and his wife; nor does he add that Pompilia, therefore, did not know what she had written, though, unlike the child, she could have understood and would have repudiated the whole letter had she done so. In fact his words would imply the opposite.

I taught my wife her duty, made her see
What it behoved her see and say and do,
Feel in her heart and with her tongue declare.¹

But this is just what he did not do. He then tells how, after the flight of the Comparini, Pompilia began

Launching her looks forth, letting looks reply
As arrows to a challenge,²

at the church, the theatre, and even at her own window, until finally Caponsacchi appeared on the scene. He knows, he says, that men consider his treatment now became too harsh, grants that he threatened her with the sword and pretended to poison her, but adds that this was just the useless course, as facts afterwards showed. He should simply have cut off the first joint of her marriage finger and promised to cut off the next if he found anyone again beneath her window. The result of his too mild treatment, he adds, was simply the robbery and flight. He points out here, also, that his friends blame him for not having killed the couple when he caught them at the inn, but that now, when taking their advice he has killed the guilty three, they blame him again. Do his judges believe, he asks, that cowardice held his hand at the inn at Castelnovo? The truth is simply, if they will accept it, that his ingrained reverence for law and religion bade him await the authoritative word before striking. He relates the events of the

¹ C.G.F. 854-6.

² C.G.F. 900-1.

trial, the decision of the court, and his return to Arezzo.

Step

By step, across the pelting, did I reach
 Arezzo, underwent the archway's grin,
 Traversed the length of sarcasm in the street,
 Found myself in my horrible house once more,
 And after a colloquy . . . no word assists!
 With the mother and the brothers, stiffened me
 Straight out from head to foot as dead man does,
 And, thus prepared for life as he for hell,
 Marched to the public Square and met the world.¹

Are these things not worse, he asks, than the torture he had just undergone?

I played the man as I best might, bade friends
 Put non-essentials by and face the fact,²

which was, that punishment, however slight, still meant guilt, and so by the decision of the court both Caponsacchi and Pompilia were guilty. Here Guido's facts are correct, but what he implies at this point and afterwards plainly deduces from these facts, does not follow at all.

" Guilty " is the decision of the Court,
 And that I stand in consequence untouched,
 One white integrity from head to heel.³

But the question was one of degree of guilt, and the decision of the court showed, first, that the judges considered their guilt so slight as to merit merely trivial punishment; second—and this is the important point—by granting Pompilia separation from her husband they justified her flight, which was in itself a plain condemnation of Guido.

Proceeding, Guido adds that he entered a plea for divorce, founded upon their evident guilt. In three months, however, he received a letter from Rome, telling him that his

¹ *C.G.F.* 1265-74.

² *C.G.F.* 1278-9.

³ *C.G.F.* 1895-7.

“plan for the divorce is all mistake”, and has been met by Pompilia’s “cross suit”, as he puts it, for divorce from him, that she has been allowed to leave the convent and return to the house of Pietro and Violante, that the house they have chosen as her residence and theirs is not that in Via Vittoria in the eye of the world,

“ But a certain villa smothered up in vines
 “ At the town’s edge by the gate i’ the Pauline Way,
 “ Out of eye-reach, out of ear-shot, little and lone,
 “ Whither a friend,—at Civita, we hope,
 “ A good half-dozen-hour’s ride off,—might, some eve,
 “ Betake himself, and whence ride back, some morn,
 “ Nobody the wiser,”¹

and finally that Paolo in despair has sold his house and goods and fled from Rome. Now, he goes on,

I see my lords
 Shift in their seat,—would I could do the same!

.
 I got such missives in the public place;
 When I sought home,—with such news, mounted stair
 And sat at last in the sombre gallery,
 (’T was Autumn, the old mother in bed betimes,
 Having to bear that cold, the finer frame
 Of her daughter-in-law had found intolerable—
 The brother, walking misery away
 O’ the mountain-side with dog and gun belike)
 As I supped, ate the coarse bread, drank the wine
 Weak once, now acrid with the toad’s-head-squeeze,
 My wife’s bestowment,—I broke silence thus:²

How skilfully he represents the would-be pathetic side of his poverty and failure! He has almost done now with the other points of view; we hear no more of his rights of purchase in flesh and blood; the natural man, too, the real Guido, is kept well hidden while he works up to the final

¹ C.G.F. 1335-41.

² C.G.F. 1374-90.

deed, the murder, and thence to the peroration, picturing himself as he advances step by step as the suffering Christian Hero. The speech to which the last quotation leads up begins thus:

“ Let me, a man, manfully meet the fact,
 “ Confront the worst o’ the truth, end, and have peace!
 “ I am irremediably beaten here,—
 “ The gross illiterate vulgar couple,—bah!
 “ Why, they have measured forces, mastered mine,
 “ Made me their spoil and prey from first to last.

 “ Why claim escape from man’s predestined lot
 “ Of being beaten and baffled?—God’s decree,
 “ In which I, bowing bruised head, acquiesce.”¹

The end of this supposed soliloquy shows how he leads up to his justification of the murder.

“ I am the last
 “ O’ my line which will not suffer any more.
 “ I have attained to my full fifty years,
 “ (About the average of us all, ’t is said,
 “ Though it seems longer to the unlucky man)
 “ —Lived through my share of life; let all end here,
 “ Me and the house and grief and shame at once.”²

But in December, he tells us, he got word that Pompilia had given birth to his son and heir, “ lawful—’tis only eight months since your wife left you ”, and now at last his indignation masters him.

Then I rose up like fire, and fire-like roared.

.
 Is he indeed my flesh and blood, this babe?

.
 Why then, the surplusage of disgrace, the spilth
 Over and above the measure of infamy,
 Failing to take effect on my coarse flesh
 Seasoned with scorn now, saturate with shame,—

¹ C.G.F. 1391-1418.

² C.G.F. 1426-32.

Is saved to instil on and corrode the brow,
 The baby-softness of my first-born child—
 The child I had died to see though in a dream,
 The child I was bid strike out for, beat the wave
 And baffle the tide of troubles where I swam,

Born now in very deed to bear this brand
 On forehead and curse me who could not save!¹

Far better would it be, he continues, that the popular scandal and his "own inmost heart's confession" should prove true and this child be not his but Caponsacchi's. This then, perhaps, was the 'cause of the flight. But was he to allow the vermin thus hatched in his flesh to live? No: he was a man, had friends, and would strike; and so he ends with *Quis est pro Domino*, who is on the Lord's side? It should be noted here that he leads us to believe his "own inmost heart's confession" to be that the child was a bastard and none of his, and apparently at the time intends to stamp it out also. In the peroration he presents us with a different picture as we shall see. He tells now of his appeal to his servants, their honest rustic indignation and ready offer to help him (he says nothing of the reward he offered them), their journey to Rome and arrival on Christmas Eve. There is something revolting in the blasphemy by which he represents himself as touched and awed by the signification of the Christmas feast.

Festive bells—everywhere the Feast o' the Babe,
 Joy upon earth, peace and goodwill to man!
 I am baptized. I started and let drop
 The dagger. "Where is it, His promised peace?"
 Nine days o' the Birth-Feast did I pause and pray
 To enter into no temptation more.²

He describes his men waiting, wondering why he delayed, and how

¹ C.G.F. 1483-1528.

² C.G.F. 1582-7.

I stopped my ears even to the inner call
 Of the dread duty, only heard the song
 "Peace upon earth", saw nothing but the face
 O' the Holy Infant and the halo there
 Able to cover yet another face
 Behind it, Satan's which I else should see.¹

But as the days passed,

For the angels' song,
 "Peace upon earth", louder and louder pealed
 "O Lord, how long, how long be unavenged?"²

On the ninth day, he tells us, the voice of God himself
 "syllabled" within his brain a plan by means of which to
 test once for all the guilt or innocence of his wife. His
 plan was to go to the door of the villa and ask them to open
 to Caponsacchi. If they opened they confessed their guilt.
 He carried out this divine plan, found his way to the house,
 knocked, asked the inmates to open to Caponsacchi, and,
 as he says tragically, "the door opened". His worst fears,
 he says, were now confirmed, but still,

Had but Pompilia's self, the tender thing
 Who once was good and pure, was once my lamb
 And lay in my bosom, had the well-known shape
 Fronted me in the door-way,³

he might have hesitated. What has become of the training
 of the hawk? for, as he assured us before,

Pompilia was no pigeon, Venus' pet,
 but a hawk,
 I bought at a hawk's price and carried home
 To do hawk's service.⁴

The hawk was once a lamb apparently, or became one
 through his training, and lay in his bosom. What his real

¹ C.G.F. 1596-1601. ² C.G.F. 1608-10. ³ C.G.F. 1638-41. ⁴ C.G.F. 701-5.

thoughts were while he stood at the door we have already seen. They are clearly indicated in the following quotation from his last speech.

It cannot be but I surprise my wife—
If only she is stopped and stamped on, good!
That shall suffice.¹

But, as he tells us, it was Violante, who had cheated and wronged him most and most deserved his hate, who opened, and he was

rapt away by the impulse, one
Immeasurable everlasting wave of a need
To abolish that detested life.²

He suggests that the other two, Pietro and Pompilia, were not directly aimed at, but simply got entangled in the murder and were stabbed in a sort of blind fury.

'T was done:
You know the rest and how the folds o' the thing,
Twisting for help, involved the other two
More or less serpent-like: how I was mad,
Blind, stamped on all, the earth-worms with the asp,
And ended so.³

Referring to the capture, he rather skilfully makes use even of it, pointing out that he was found " sound sleeping as a child " and, as he implies, so free from all sense of guilt that even the bloody weapons were found lying beside him. He speaks of the " lying intoxicating smoke " sure to rise when Caponsacchi and Pompilia tell their tales, but adds:

The trial is no concern of mine; with me
The main of the care is over: I at least
Recognize who took that huge burthen off,
Let me begin to live again. I did
God's bidding and man's duty, so, breathe free;

¹ G. 1598-1600.

² C.G.F. 1662-4.

³ C.G.F. 1664-9.

Look you to the rest! I heard Himself prescribe,
That great Physician, and dared lance the core
Of the bad ulcer.¹

Compare with the above the following extract, which I have already quoted, from his real confession to the Cardinal the night before his execution:

Henceforth

I might thrive: these were drawn and dead and damned.
Oh Cardinal, the deep long sigh you heave
When the load 's off you, ringing as it runs
All the way down the serpent-stair to hell! ²

The following string of arguments is worthy of note, showing as it does how Guido bends everything to his need, proving his innocence by his failure. His life, he declares, was valueless while these three lived. How valueless it was let them judge from the following facts: first, instead of hiring assassins to do the deed and remaining himself safe in Arezzo, he undertook the murder himself, plunging head-first carelessly into the danger. Second, an ordinary schemer in planning such a murder would at least have prepared a way of escape; but he was so careless of his life that he had not even thought of procuring a warrant, which they knew he could have had for the asking, and with which he could have escaped across the frontier into Tuscany. Third, his carelessness was evident from the fact that he had hired four of his servants, and yet what need was there of them when he did the deed with his own right hand? Having hired them, had he been wise, he would have stayed at home and left the matter to them, and when they returned for their pay, have disowned his share in the deed and discarded them. Fourth and lastly, as they knew, he might have taken a much safer way, and poisoned the three with *acquetta* in his own house.

¹ C.G.F. 1699-1706. ² G. 1609-13.

Why use such tools at all
 When a man's foes are of his house, like mine,
 Sit at his board, sleep in his bed? Why noise,
 When there 's the *acquetta* and the silent way?
 Clearly my life was valueless.¹

The remainder of his speech, some three hundred lines, is a sort of résumé of the proof he has given.

I take my stand,
 Make my defence. God shall not lose a life
 May do Him further service, while I speak
 And you hear, you my judges and last hope!²

His last argument is an attempt to show that in reality he has but carried out their own decree. They had declared Pompilia guilty, though the punishment they had meted out to her was indeed inadequate, and since the trial her guilt had so deepened, and become so evident, that it was necessary to trample it out.

Absolve, then, me, law's mere executant!
 Protect your own defender,—save me, Sirs!³

We now come to the peroration. In it he points out the uses he still has for life, his old mother to comfort and support, his brother Paolo to call back to his duty to the Church, and his younger brother Girolamo once more to confirm in the faith. Lastly he refers to his child. He has already told us that his "inmost heart's confession" was that he was the son of Caponsacchi and Pompilia, and has described him as "their bastard". But he speaks differently now:

Give me—for last, best gift—my son again,
 Whom law makes mine,—I take him at your word,
 Mine be he, by miraculous mercy, lords!
 Let me lift up his youth and innocence
 To purify my palace, room by room

¹ C.G.F. 1734-8.

² C.G.F. 1745-8.

³ C.G.F. 2003-4.

Purged of the memories, lend from his bright brow
Light to the old proud paladin my sire
Shrunk now for shame into the darkest shade
O' the tapestry, showed him once and shrouds him now!
Then may we,—strong from that rekindled smile,—
Go forward, face new times, the better day.

Then will I set my son at my right-hand
And tell his father's story to this point,
Adding "The task seemed superhuman, still
"I dared and did it, trusting God and law:
"And they approved of me: give praise to both!"
And if, for answer, he shall stoop to kiss
My hand, and peradventure start thereat,—
I engage to smile "That was an accident
"I' the necessary process,—just a trip
"O' the torture-irons in their search for truth,—
Hardly misfortune, and no fault at all."¹

Thus "Guido, after being tortured, spoke".

¹ *C.G.F.* 2026-58.

VII

GIUSEPPE CAPONSACCHI

There stands he,
While the same grim black-panelled chamber blinks
As though rubbed shiny with the sins of Rome
Told the same oak for ages—wave-washed wall
Against which sets a sea of wickedness.
There, where you yesterday heard Guido speak,
Speaks Caponsacchi.¹

After Guido's mesh of sophistry and hypocrisy the speech of Caponsacchi comes to the reader like a keen, fresh, salt-sea breeze. There is something in his bitter denunciation of his judges, his fearless exposition of the truth and contempt for their blindness, his wholehearted devotion to Pompilia and carelessness for what the low world may think, that is bracing and life-giving to the whole spiritual nature; something, too, in his bitter anger as he thinks of how he failed to slay Guido and may yet have a chance of meeting the Governor, Vincenzo Marzi-Medici, something that is completely satisfying in the knowledge that face to face and sword to sword with Caponsacchi it would not go well with them.

But far above all these Caponsacchi has the soul of a poet, and his own tragic failure with its intensity of suffering calls to life all the power and beauty of his character. He stands before us a martyr undergoing his last supreme trial, the throes of a new birth of the divine in him. His noble

¹ *R. and B.* 1045-51.

humility, his thirst for truth, and devotion to the pure and good, his recognition of his own utter weakness and littleness and of the greatness and beauty of human life as it should be, his love so truly human in its passion, its suffering, its humility, his last great cry of aspiration and despair, all these thrill us as only the greatest things in literature can. As we read we are one with him; the glory and purity of his love for Pompilia is ours, his strength and weakness ours, his suffering ours; we take up his cross, but feel also all the glory of his martyrdom and we return to our little selves humbled and dissatisfied, but full of aspiring hope.

I have already related his first appearance before these judges, and how the world and its method of judging as personified in them abashed him. But that, as he tells us, was "six months ago", and during his relegation at Civita the new life has been maturing in him. And now when he is brought once more before his judges and informed of the murder, he stands strong not only in the consciousness of his own innocence, but also in the proof Guido has given of it and of their folly. Stunned, confused by the terrible news, feeling that but for the blindness of his judges Pompilia might have been saved, that he might even have had the joy of saving her again, he speaks, but now he

Is grown judge himself, terrifies now
This, now the other culprit called a judge,
Whose turn it is to stammer and look strange,
As he speaks rapidly, angrily, speech that smites:
And they keep silence, bear blow after blow.¹

His first words are:

Answer you, Sirs? Do I understand aright?
Have patience! In this sudden smoke from hell,—
So things disguise themselves,—I cannot see

¹ *R. and B.* 1067-71.

My own hand held thus broad before my face
 And know it again. Answer you? Then that means
 Tell over twice what I, the first time, told
 Six months ago: 't was here, I do believe,
 Fronting you same three in this very room,
 I stood and told you: yet now no one laughs,

And now you sit as grave, stare as aghast
 As if I were a phantom: now 't is—" Friend,
 " Collect yourself!"—no laughing matter more—
 " Counsel the Court in this extremity,
 " Tell us again!"—tell that, for telling which,
 I got the jocular piece of punishment,
 Was sent to lounge a little in the place
 Whence now of a sudden here you summon me
 To take the intelligence from just—your lips!
 You, Judge Tommati, who then tittered most,—
 That she I helped eight months since to escape
 Her husband, was retaken by the same,
 Three days ago, if I have seized your sense,—
 (I being disallowed to interfere,
 Meddle or make in a matter none of mine,
 For you and law were guardians quite enough
 O' the innocent, without a pert priest's help)—
 And that he has butchered her accordingly,
 As she foretold and as myself believed.¹

But now, he asks, what is it they wish him to do? Is the
 fact which " seems to fill the universe with sight and sound "
 to him, not clear to them yet? Do they still need explanation?

Well then, let me, the hollow rock, condense,
 The voice o' the sea and wind, interpret you
 The mystery of this murder. God above!
 It is too paltry, such a transference
 O' the storm's roar to the cranny of the stone!
 This deed, you saw begin—why does its end
 Surprise you? Why should the event enforce
 The lesson, we ourselves learned, she and I,
 From the first o' the fact, and taught you, all in vain? ²

¹ G.G. 1-43.

² G.G. 72-80.

Was Guido the man, he asks, to be let work his will on Pompilia, or was her flight and his intervention on her behalf justifiable now in their eyes? Their former decision was that

Law,
 Law was aware and watching, would suffice,
 Wanted no priest's intrusion, palpably
 Pretence, too manifest a subterfuge!
 Whereupon I, priest, coxcomb, fribble and fool,
 Ensconced me in my corner, thus rebuked,
 A kind of culprit, over-zealous hound
 Kicked for his pains to kennel; I gave place
 To you, and let the law reign paramount:
 I left Pompilia to your watch and ward,
 And now you point me—there and thus she lies! ¹

He then goes on peremptorily: "Men, for the last time, what do you want with me?" Is this merely their way of telling him that his relegation is now over, that his action has been justified, and that he is once more "a very reputable priest"?

But she—
 The glory of life, the beauty of the world,
 The splendour of heaven, . . . well, Sirs, does no one move?
 Do I speak ambiguously? The glory, I say,
 And the beauty, I say, and splendour, still say I,
 Who, priest and trained to live my whole life long
 On beauty and splendour, solely at their source,
 God,—have thus recognized my food in her,
 You tell me, that 's fast dying while we talk,
 Pompilia! ²

Where is their laughter now, he asks, where is "the proper wink" at his transparent "mundane love"?

You are all struck acquiescent now, it seems:
 It seems the oldest, gravest signor here,
 Even the redoubtable Tommati, sits
 Chop-fallen,—understands how law might take

¹ G.C. 94-104.

² G.C. 117-26.

Service like mine, of brain and heart and hand,
 In good part. Better late than never, law
 You understand of a sudden, gospel too
 Has a claim here, may possibly pronounce
 Consistent with my priesthood, worthy Christ,
 That I endeavoured to save Pompilia?¹

They were wrong then, he declares, and see it now, adding that the recognition of his mistake is about all we can expect of man "this side the grave". This, however, is not the last case they will have to judge. For them and others like them there will be many another such case, many another Guido to try; but for himself

My part

Is done; i' the doing it, I pass away
 Out of the world. I want no more with earth.
 Let me, in heaven's name, use the very snuff
 O' the taper in one last spark shall show truth
 For a moment, show Pompilia who was true!
 Not for her sake, but yours: if she is dead,
 Oh, Sirs, she can be loved by none of you
 Most or least priestly! Saints, to do us good,
 Must be in heaven, I seem to understand:
 We never find them saints before, at least.
 Be her first prayer then presently for you—
 She has done the good to me.²

And here Caponsacchi awakes to the situation, checks the wild whirl of thoughts eddying through his brain, and changes at once from the judge to the man conscious of his weakness.

What is all this?

There, I was born, have lived, shall die, a fool!
 This is a foolish outset:—might with cause
 Give colour to the very lie o' the man,
 The murderer,—make as if I loved his wife,
 In the way he called love. He is the fool there!

You can't think, men as you are, all of you,

¹ G.C. 131-40.

² G.C. 167-79.

But that, to hear thus suddenly such an end
Of such a wonderful white soul, that comes
Of a man and murderer calling the white black,
Must shake me, trouble and disadvantage. Sirs,
Only seventeen!

Why, good and wise you are!
You might at the beginning stop my mouth:
So, none would be to speak for her, that knew.
I talk impertinently, and you bear,
All the same. This it is to have to do
With honest hearts: they easily may err,
But in the main they wish well to the truth.
You are Christians; somehow, no one ever plucked
A rag, even, from the body of the Lord,
To wear and mock with, but, despite himself,
He looked the greater and was the better. Yes,
I shall go on now. Does she need or not
I keep calm? Calm I 'll keep as monk that croons
Transcribing battle, earthquake, famine, plague,
From parchment to his cloister's chronicle.
Not one word more from the point now!¹

And here follows the story of his own life from his entering the Church to the day in which he speaks.

This I have already given, the quotations I have used being chiefly from the book *Giuseppe Caponsacchi*. And so I pass over the next 1360 lines of the speech, taking from them but one quotation to show how his forced calmness at times gives way under the pressure of his misery.

Sirs, how should I lie quiet in my grave
Unless you suffer me wring, drop by drop,
My brain dry, make a riddance of the drench
Of minutes with a memory in each,
Recorded motion, breath or look of hers,
Which poured forth would present you one pure glass,
Mirror you plain,—as God's sea, glassed in gold,
His saints,—the perfect soul Pompilia? Men,
You must know that a man gets drunk with truth
Stagnant inside him! Oh, they 've killed her, Sirs!
Can I be calm?²

¹ G.C. 180-219.

² G.C. 1155-65.

Again, later, as there flashes before his mind the picture of Pompilia with the sword, he breaks out with:

No, Sirs, I cannot have the lady dead!
That erect form, flashing brow, fulgurant eye,
That voice immortal (oh, that voice of hers!)
That vision in the blood-red day-break—that
Leap to life of the pale electric sword
Angels go armed with,—that was not the last
O' the lady!¹

And here he appeals to the Court for permission to go to see Pompilia, but remembering that he has not yet finished his tale, calms himself and proceeds to tell the story of the first trial. I have spoken of his bitter denunciation of his judges and the following will show what I mean. Referring to their former decision and feeling more keenly than ever their blindness and its terrible consequences, he addresses them thus:

You blind guides who must needs lead eyes that see!
Fools, alike ignorant of man and God!
What was there here should have perplexed your wit
For a wink of the owl-eyes of you?²

Why, he asks, when they so far sanctioned Pompilia's flight as to free her from her husband, why could they not take the one step more and justify her entirely by admitting that the case was exceptional? Instead they had simply played "into the devil's hands", and, by declaring Pompilia guilty in part, had given Guido just the chance he wanted.

I saved his wife
Against law: against law he slays her now:
Deal with him!³

He proceeds with a passage of such dignity and strength that for the moment he seems to tower above his judges.

¹ G.C. 1599-1605.

² G.C. 1783-6.

³ G.C. 1857-9.

I have done with being judged.
 I stand here guiltless in thought, word and deed,
 To the point that I apprise you,—in contempt
 For all misapprehending ignorance
 O' the human heart, much more the mind of Christ,—
 That I assuredly did bow, was blessed
 By the revelation of Pompilia. There!
 Such is the final fact I fling you, Sirs,
 To mouth and mumble and misinterpret: there!¹

and then turning upon them he pours out a bitter criticism on the worldliness of the Church as he has known it. But the appearance of one touch of real human feeling in his judges calms and humbles him at once.

For Pompilia—be advised.
 Build churches, go pray! You will find me there,
 I know, if you come,—and you will come, I know.
 Why, there's a judge weeping! Did not I say
 You were good and true at bottom? You see the truth—
 I am glad I helped you: she helped me just so.²

And now feeling that the court are at one with him he asks what they will do with Count Guido. He confesses his own inability to treat such a question, but he says,

Oh, not death!
 Death, if it let her life be: otherwise
 Not death,—your lights will teach you clearer! I
 Certainly have an instinct of my own
 I' the matter: bear with me and weigh its worth!
 Let us go away—leave Guido all alone
 Back on the world again that knows him now!
 I think he will be found (indulge so far!)
 Not to die so much as slide out of life,
 Pushed by the general horror and common hate
 Low, lower,—left o' the very ledge of things,
 I seem to see him catch convulsively
 One by one at all honest forms of life,
 At reason, order, decency and use—

¹ G.G. 1860-8.² G.C. 1881-6.

To cramp him and get foothold by at least;
 And still they disengage them from his clutch.
 "What, you are he, then, had Pompilia once
 "And so forewent her? Take not up with us!"
 And thus I see him slowly and surely edged
 Off all the table-land whence life upsprings
 Aspiring to be immortality.¹

So I lose Guido in the loneliness,
 Silence and dusk, till at the doleful end,
 At the horizontal line, creation's verge,
 From what just is to absolute nothingness—
 Whom is it, straining onward still, he meets?
 What other man deep further in the fate,
 Who, turning at the prize of a footfall
 To flatter him and promise fellowship,
 Discovers in the act a frightful face—
 Judas, made monstrous by much solitude!²

The cockatrice is with the basilisk!
 There let them grapple, denizens o' the dark,
 Foes or friends, but indissolubly bound,
 In their one spot out of the ken of God
 Or care of man, for ever and ever more!³

Here his hatred, not of the man Guido but of the evil he represents, has carried him away, but once more he collects himself and turns again to the facts of the trial, and here incidentally he gives us a beautiful description of Pompilia's face.

Oh, I saw, be sure!
 Her brow had not the right line, leaned too much,
 Painters would say; they like the straight-up Greek:
 This seemed bent somewhat with an invisible crown
 Of martyr and saint, not such as art approves.
 And how the dark orbs dwelt deep underneath,
 Looked out of such a sad sweet heaven on me!
 The lips, compressed a little, came forward too,
 Careful for a whole world of sin and pain.⁴

¹ G.C. 1903-23.² G.C. 1928-37.³ G.C. 1950-4.⁴ G.C. 1988-96.

A little later, when he refers to the sentence of the court at Arezzo on Pompilia for her flight, over which court the Governor who had refused her help, Vincenzo Marzi-Medici, presided, we feel once more the bitterness of his anger breaking forth, the restraint of the language he uses merely serving to enforce the meaning:

If these unpriest me, you and I may yet
Converse, Vincenzo Marzi-Medici!¹

Then turning from the thought of Arezzo he breaks out into one of these noble passages that are the glory of this book.

Rome for me henceforward—Rome,
Where better men are,—most of all, that man
The Augustinian of the Hospital,
Who writes the letter,—he confessed, he says,
Many a dying person, never one
So sweet and true and pure and beautiful.
A good man! Will you make him Pope one day?
Not that he is not good too, this we have—
But old,—else he would have his word to speak,
His truth to teach the world: I thirst for truth,
But shall not drink it till I reach the source.²

This leads us to the peroration which I shall give in full. Comparisons, as always, would give nothing but offence, but if anyone doubts what I have said, that there are things in *Giuseppe Caponsacchi* which move us as only the greatest things in literature can, or thinks that at any point I have spoken too enthusiastically of Caponsacchi, let him read the following not as a separate passage but as the peroration to a noble speech, and judge.

Sirs, I am quiet again. You see, we are
So very pitiable, she and I,
Who had conceivably been otherwise.
Forget distemperature and idle heat!

¹ G.C. 2050-1.

² G.C. 2058-68.

Apart from truth's sake, what 's to move so much?
Pompilia will be presently with God;
I am, on earth, as good as out of it,
A relegated priest; when exile ends,
I mean to do my duty and live long.
She and I are mere strangers now; but priests
Should study passion; how else cure mankind,
Who come for help in passionate extremes?
I do but play with an imagined life
Of who, unfettered by a vow, unblest
By the higher call,—since you will have it so,—
Leads it companioned by the woman there.
To live, and see her learn, and learn by her,
Out of the low obscure and petty world—
Or only see one purpose and one will
Evolve themselves i' the world, change wrong to right:
To have to do with nothing but the true,
The good, the eternal—and these, not alone
In the main current of the general life,
But small experiences of every day,
Concerns of the particular hearth and home:
To learn not only by a comet's rush
But a rose's birth,—not by the grandeur, God—
But the comfort, Christ. All this, how far away!
Mere delectation, meet for a minute's dream!—
Just as a drudging student trims his lamp,
Opens his Plutarch, puts him in the place
Of Roman, Grecian; draws the patched gown close,
Dreams, "Thus should I fight, save or rule the world!"—
Then smilingly, contentedly, awakes
To the old solitary nothingness.
So I, from such communion, pass content . . .
O great, just, good God! Miserable me!¹

¹ G.C. 2069-105.

VIII

POMPILIA

As far as I can make out, Pompilia and Caponsacchi must have spoken on the same day. Browning tells us that Caponsacchi spoke the day after Guido:

There, where you yesterday heard Guido speak,
Speaks Caponsacchi;¹

and Caponsacchi says:

It is but a few days are passed, I find,
Since this adventure. Do you tell me, four?²

We have no reason for distrusting his statement, especially when we consider the form in which it is put. It is true that Caponsacchi contradicts this in the words:

That she I helped eight months since to escape
Her husband, was retaken by the same,
Three days ago, if I have seized your sense.³

But he also contradicts himself later when he says:

She had only you to trust to, you and Rome,
Rome and the Church, and no pert meddling priest
Two days ago, when Guido, with the right,
Hacked her to pieces.⁴

It is evident that the main fact of the murder has so absorbed him, that he has not yet grasped the details,

¹ *R. and B.* 1050-1

² *C.G.F.* 1682-3.

³ *G.C.* 35-7.

⁴ *G.C.* 1630-3.

and forgets all small points; and in support of this I might add that in telling the story of the journey to Rome he at one part cannot recall the names of the places.

It was at . . . ah, but I forget the names!
 'T is a mere post-house and a hovel or two;

.
 This was—I know not where—there 's a great hill
 Close over, and the stream has lost its bridge,
 One fords it.¹

Guido then, we may assume, spoke on the 6th of January, Caponsacchi on the 7th. But Pompilia says:

“ Six days ago when it was New Year's day,”²

from which it would appear that she also spoke on the 7th of January, the fifth day after the murder of Pietro and Violante. I may as well point out, however, that Pompilia also contradicts herself. “ Six days ago ” she tells us was New Year's day, and, according to her own tale, the murder took place the day after New Year's Day, which was therefore five days ago, yet she says later “ Just four days ago—the night and the tap ”. Browning's words corroborate this:

Then a soul sighs its lowest and its last
 After the loud ones,—so much breath remains
 Unused by the four-days'-dying; for she lived
 Thus long, miraculously long, 't was thought,
 Just that Pompilia might defend herself.³

I have spoken so often of Pompilia that there seems but little left to say. The beautiful simplicity and purity of her character no reader can fail to see, but only from her own words can we understand the full meaning of the Pope's remark concerning her:

¹ *G.C.* 1208-16.

² *P.* 220.

³ *R. and B.* 1076-80.

God's gift of a purity of soul
That will not take pollution, ermine-like
Armed from dishonour by its own soft snow.¹

Pompilia does not strive to be pure and good; she is that without any striving. There is no flaw in her soul, and were we anxious to find any fault it could only be that she is too perfect, but even this criticism fails because, perfect as she is, she is still essentially human. Without her help also we could not appreciate how noble Caponsacchi really is. The good old Pope sums up his character with all his wisdom and experience of men. Caponsacchi himself in his speech seems to lay his very soul bare to our eyes. But there is truth in the statement that only to the woman he loves and who returns his love can a man show what is highest and noblest in him, and she alone has eyes to see it. And thus Pompilia's picture of Caponsacchi has a higher truth than that of the Pope, and nowhere does Pompilia appear more beautiful, more human, more worthy of all our heart's devotion, than when Caponsacchi speaks of her. And this is as it should be. If there is one thing more wonderful than any other in the character of Pompilia—and I use the word wonderful advisedly—it is the absoluteness of her trust in God; and if there is one thing which, in spite of the misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the world, comes through all trials pure from any stain it is her love for Caponsacchi. I have spoken of the effect produced upon Caponsacchi by his meeting with Pompilia, and it is true that under her influence his character awakened and rose to its full height. It is sometimes declared, however, that Pompilia saved Caponsacchi, as if but for her he might have sunk to the level of the mere worldly churchmen of the time. This I think is false. It may be granted at once, of

¹ *Pope*, 678–80.

course, that without a Pompilia he could not have developed as he did, could never have reached his highest. But this is true, not only of him, but of everyone. We are not self-sufficing units, capable unaided of complete self-development, independent of the world around. Granted a suitable environment, the acorn will develop into a splendid oak, but whatever the conditions, if the acorn live at all, it will live only as an oak, and so with Caponsacchi. It might seem that Browning himself wished to suggest this. We have seen how Caponsacchi's deeper nature was called to life on his entering the Church. He declares at another point:

I have thought sometimes, and thought long and hard.
 I have stood before, gone round a serious thing,
 Tasked my whole mind to touch and clasp it close,
 As I stretch forth my arm to touch this bar.
 God and man, and what duty I owe both,—
 I dare to say I have confronted these
 In thought;¹

and it seems to me that here he is referring, without doubt, to a time before his meeting with Pompilia. His effect, too, upon the worldly Canon Conti is just as marked.

" Our Caponsacchi, he 's your true Saint George
 " To slay the monster, set the Princess free,
 " And have the whole High-Altar to himself:
 " I always think so when I see that piece
 " I' the Pieve, that's his church and mine, you know." ²

And now I would add that his effect upon Pompilia is no less wonderful than hers upon him, and Pompilia is the first to acknowledge it. Caponsacchi should be taken as the one authority upon the change worked in his life by his meeting with Pompilia, and Pompilia as the one authority for his effect upon her. Caponsacchi's entry

¹ G.G. 938-44.

² P. 1323-7.

into her life was like the coming of the sunlight to the lily. "This one heart gave me all the spring", she says. Less than pure and beautiful Pompilia could not be. But when we acquiesce in the Pope's description of her:

My flower,
My rose, I gather for the breast of God,¹

let us not forget the debt we owe to Caponsacchi. And surely nothing is more beautiful, more perfect in the whole poem, than the picture of those two so long having lived a starved half-life, rising at once to their full power and beauty in the warmth and light of their love.

In the first chapter I have described Pompilia in the hospital and the conditions under which she spoke.

How, while the hireling and the alien stoop,
Comfort, yet question,—since the time is brief,
And folk, allowably inquisitive,
Encircle the low pallet where she lies
In the good house that helps the poor to die,—
Pompilia tells the story of her life.²

.

So, to the common kindness she speaks,
There being scarce more privacy at the last
For mind than body: but she is used to bear,
And only unused to the brotherly look.³

I would draw attention here to the fact that the language of this book is, as it should be, much simpler than that of any of the other books, but—and this to me is its one fault—the manner is the same as that of the others. In no other speaker does the marked style of Browning offend, while in some such as Giuseppe Caponsacchi and The Pope it suits admirably. Nor yet does the similarity in manner which thus marks all the other speakers offend. This similarity, however, is much greater than the casual reader

¹ *Pope*, 1046-7.

² *R. and B.* 1081-6.

³ *R. and B.* 1100-3.

may imagine. For instance, into whose mouth would one put the following?

But now, a question,—how long does it lie,
The bad and barren bit of stuff you kick,
Before encroached on and encompassed round
With minute moss, weed, wild-flower—made alive
By worm, and fly, and foot of the free bird; ¹

Or this?

Suppose life had no death to fear, how find
A possibility of nobleness
In man, prevented daring any more?
What 's love, what 's faith without a worse to dread?
Lack-lustre jewelry! but faith and love
With death behind them bidding do or die—
Put such a foil at back, the sparkle 's born! ²

But the style does not suit Pompilia and so far the speech is not in character, sometimes very far from being so. This, as I have said, is to me the one fault in the book. She begins thus:

I am just seventeen years and five months old,
And, if I lived one day more, three full weeks;
'T is writ so in the church's register,
Lorenzo in Lucina, all my names
At length, so many names for one poor child,
—Francesca Camilla Vittoria Angela
Pompilia Comparini,—laughable!
Also 't is writ that I was married there
Four years ago: and they will add, I hope,
When they insert my death, a word or two,—
Omitting all about the mode of death,—
This, in its place, this which one cares to know,
That I had been a mother of a son
Exactly two weeks." ³

Note the complete absence of complaint and the simplicity of the young mother's love in the following passage:

¹ *T.Q.* 233-7.

² *G.* 2379-85.

³ *P.* 1-14.

The surgeon cared for me,
 To count my wounds,—twenty-two dagger-wounds,
 Five deadly, but I do not suffer much—
 Or too much pain,—and am to die to-night.
 Oh how good God is that my babe was born,
 —Better than born, baptized and hid away
 Before this happened, safe from being hurt!
 That had been sin God could not well forgive:¹
 He was too young to smile and save himself.¹

But, as she adds later, “Now I shall never see him”;
 and what to her is worse than that, she fears that when
 her son grows to be her age he may ask what his mother
 was like and then someone may answer, “Like girls of
 seventeen ”,

And how can he but think of this and that,
 Lucias, Marias, Sofias, who titter or blush
 When he regards them as such boys may do? ²

and so she hopes one will say she looked already old though
 young. A little later she begins to comment on the strange-
 ness of her life and hopes that her son will grow to regard
 it as a sort of dream. Proceeding to show how strange her
 life had been from the beginning, she points out that she
 never had a father or a mother:

My own boy can say at least
 “I had a mother whom I kept two weeks!”
 Not I, who little used to doubt . . . *I* doubt
 Good Pietro, kind Violante, gave me birth?
 They loved me always as I love my babe
 (—Nearly so, that is—quite so could not be—).³

But, she continues, even Pietro and Violante disowned
 her; her husband also had hated instead of loving her;
 next she refers to Caponsacchi whom she regards as her

¹ P. 37-45.² P. 69-71.³ P. 132-7.

one true friend; the following passage will show how far she is from looking on him as a lover:

There is the friend,—men will not ask about,
 But tell untruths of, and give nicknames to,
 And think my lover, most surprise of all!
 Do only hear, it is the priest they mean,
 Giuseppe Caponsacchi: a priest—love,
 And love me! Well, yet people think he did.
 I am married, he has taken priestly vows,
 They know that, and yet go on, say, the same,
 “Yes, how he loves you!” “That was love”—they say,
 When anything is answered that they ask:
 Or else “No wonder you love him”—they say.
 Then they shake heads, pity much, scarcely blame—
 As if we neither of us lacked excuse,
 And anyhow are punished to the full,
 And downright love atones for everything!¹

Lastly, there is her child. He at least she had thought would remain quite her own, would not change, as everything else in her life had done. But the third day he was taken from her and hidden away lest Guido should lay traps “and catch him and by means of him catch me”. She then describes New Year’s day, Pietro’s visit the next day to the various churches, his return and praise of Church San Giovanni.

When, at the door,

A tap: we started up: you know the rest.²

Pompilia’s references to the knock at the door in the evening come at times with a peculiarly startling effect, particularly when she refers to it as “a tap”. She points out that Pietro, at least, died innocent, while Violante’s evil was meant for good, and illustrates both the evil and the good in the bargain with her mother thus:

¹ P. 160-74.

² P. 266-7.

If one should take my babe, give him a name,
 Say he was not Gaetano and my own,
 But that some other woman made his mouth
 And hands and feet,—how very false were that!
 No good could come of that; and all harm did.
 Yet if a stranger were to represent
 “Needs must you either give your babe to me
 “And let me call him mine for evermore,
 “Or let your husband get him”—ah, my God,
 That were a trial I refuse to face!¹

She describes the wretched state of her own mother who sold her:

My poor real dying mother in her rags,
 Who put me from her with the life and all,
 Poverty, pain, shame and disease at once,
 To die the easier by what price I fetched;²

but note how like Pompilia is the little addition:

Also (I hope) because I should be spared
 Sorrow and sin,—why may not that have helped?³

And yet from this act, good as it seemed, had sprung all the evil of her life. She adds, however, that Violante meant well and asks if it has been so bad after all. Being on her death-bed she says she cannot judge; for already her sorrows are changing into something “not altogether sorrow like”.

Yes, everybody that leaves life sees all
 Softened and bettered: so with other sights:
 To me at least was never evening yet
 But seemed far beautifuller than its day,
 For past is past.⁴

At one point in the journey, she tells us, they entered a hovel to get food, and immediately the dogs began to yelp and bark, continuing till they left.

¹ P. 275-84.

² P. 287-90.

³ P. 291-2.

⁴ P. 355-9.

The hovel is life: no matter what dogs bit
 Or cats scratched in the hovel I break from,
 All outside is lone field, moon and such peace—
 Flowing in, filling up as with a sea
 Whereon comes Someone, walks fast on the white,
 Jesus Christ's self, Don Celestine declares,
 To meet me and calm all things back again.¹

Here she begins the story of her life and tells it up to the interview with the archbishop. Thinking of the horror of her life with Guido she turns with infinite pity to the thought of how much more terrible her mother's lot was:

My own real mother, whom I never knew,
 Who did wrong (if she needs must have done wrong)
 Through being all her life, not my four years,
 At mercy of the hateful.²

But now, knowing what men call love, she points out that her mother's sin in selling her may have been love indeed, and not the hateful thing she has experienced under that name.

If she sold . . . what they call, sold . . . me her child—
 I shall believe she hoped in her poor heart
 That I at least might try be good and pure,
 Begin to live untempted, not go doomed
 And done with ere once found in fault, as she.
 Oh and, my mother, it all came to this?³

.
 This it was for you sacrificed your babe?
 Gained just this, giving your heart's hope away
 As I might give mine, loving it as you,
 If . . . but that never could be asked of me!⁴

I have spoken of the absoluteness of Pompilia's trust in God. It must be remembered that in her bed she was surrounded by friends among whom was Don Celestine of

¹ P. 366-72.² P. 864-7.³ P. 878-83.⁴ P. 891-4.

the hospital, who had heard her confession, that Caponsacchi was alive and ready, she knew, to devote himself again to her service. With such friends at hand what plan does she make for the future of her child? Pompilia has seen too much of the futility of human plans and her trust in God is too great for fear. Note her words:

There, enough! I have my support again,
Again the knowledge that my babe was, is,
Will be mine only. Him, by death, I give
Outright to God, without a further care,—
But not to any parent in the world,—
So to be safe: why is it we repine?
What guardianship were safer could we choose?
All human plans and projects come to naught:
My life, and what I know of other lives,
Prove that: no plan or project! God shall care!¹

Turning once again to what seems so strange to her, the fact that even her friends misinterpret the relation between her and Caponsacchi, she says:

That man, you misinterpret and misprise—
The glory of his nature, I had thought,
Shot itself out in white light, blazed the truth
Through every atom of his act with me.²

And so she gathers strength for a last effort to clear the name of the one man who has remained constant and true to her.

Then, I must lay my babe away with God,
Nor think of him again, for gratitude.
Yes, my last breath shall wholly spend itself
In one attempt more to disperse the stain,
The mist from other breath fond mouths have made,
About a lustrous and pellucid soul:
So that, when I am gone but sorrow stays,
And people need assurance in their doubt
If God yet have a servant, man a friend,

¹ P. 895-904.

² P. 920-3.

The weak a saviour and the vile a foe,—
 Let him be present, by the name invoked,
 Giuseppe-Maria Caponsacchi!

There,
 Strength comes already with the utterance!
 I will remember once more for his sake
 The sorrow: for he lives and is belied.
 Could he be here, how he would speak for me!¹

Here she continues the story of her life, her escape and flight with Caponsacchi, relating little incidents which showed his thoughtfulness for her, incidents which he in relating the story does not mention.

And this man, men call sinner? Jesus Christ!
 Of whom men said, with mouths Thyself mad'st once,
 "He hath a devil"—say he was Thy saint,
 My Caponsacchi.

For me,
 'Tis otherwise: let men take, sift my thoughts
 —Thoughts I throw like the flax for sun to bleach!
 I did pray, do pray, in the prayer shall die,
 "Oh, to have Caponsacchi for my guide!"
 Ever the face upturned to mine, the hand
 Holding my hand across the world,—a sense
 That reads, as only such can read, the mark
 God sets on woman, signifying so
 She should—shall peradventure—be divine;
 Yet 'ware, the while, how weakness mars the print
 And makes confusion, leaves the thing men see.²

Referring to her capture at Castelnuovo, she tells how it was the sight of her one true friend, helpless in the hands of those who followed her husband, that brought her strength back.

I did spring up, attempt to thrust aside
 That ice-block 'twixt the sun and me, lay low
 The neutralizer of all good and truth.

¹ P. 930-46.

² P. 1483-1503.

If I sinned so,—never obey voice more
 O' the Just and Terrible, who bids us—"Bear!"
 Not—"Stand by, bear to see my angels bear!"
 I am clear it was on impulse to serve God
 Not save myself,—no—nor my child unborn!¹

Pointing out how utterly they seemed in her husband's power then, how guilty in the sight of the world, she adds:

"T was truth singed the lies
 And saved me, not the vain sword nor weak speech!²

Thus she insists that she was saved, that Caponsacchi's service was crowned with success.

Others may want and wish, I wish nor want
 One point o' the circle plainer, where I stand
 Traced round about with white to front the world.³

As for the calumny of the world, she continues, what does it matter? "The end crowns all." Even her judges were right on the whole, giving her the peace and rest she needed for the sake of her child whose birth she describes in words that have a strange pathos in them.

For, as the weakness of my time drew nigh,
 Nobody did me one disservice more,
 Spoke coldly or looked strangely, broke the love
 I lay in the arms of, till my boy was born,
 Born all in love, with nought to spoil the bliss
 A whole long fortnight: in a life like mine
 A fortnight filled with bliss is long and much.
 All women are not mothers of a boy,
 Though they live twice the length of my whole life,
 And, as they fancy, happily all the same.
 There I lay, then, all my great fortnight long,
 As if it would continue, broaden out
 Happily more and more, and lead to heaven:
 Christmas before me,—was not that a chance?

¹ P. 1594-1601.

² P. 1640-1.

³ P. 1644-6.

I never realized God's birth before—
 How he grew likest God in being born.
 This time I felt like Mary, had my babe
 Lying a little on my breast like hers.
 So all went on till, just four days ago—
 The night and the tap.¹

And now for the last time referring to her husband, she freely forgives him, and expresses her hope that the world will do so also. But more than this, she thanks him for her death and triumphs in it.

Let him make God amends,—none, none to me
 Who thank him rather that, whereas strange fate
 Mockingly styled him husband and me wife,
 Himself this way at least pronounced divorce,
 Blotted the marriage-bond: this blood of mine
 Flies forth exultingly at any door,
 Washes the parchment white, and thanks the blow.²

Hate, she says, seemed to be “the truth of him”.

So he was made; he nowise made himself:
 I could not love him, but his mother did.
 His soul has never lain beside my soul:
 But for the unresisting body,—thanks!
 He burned that garment spotted by the flesh.
 Whatever he touched is rightly ruined: plague
 It caught, and disinfection it had craved
 Still but for Guido; I am saved through him
 So as by fire; to him—thanks and farewell!³

Turning now once more to the thought of her child, she again refers to the futility of all human projects, adding that during the fortnight after his birth she had been planning the various things she would do for him; but now she knows better.

¹ P. 1676-95.

² P. 1712-8.

³ P. 1731-9.

Shall not God stoop the kindlier to his work,
His marvel of creation, foot would crush,
Now that the hand He trusted to receive
And hold it, lets the treasure fall perforce?
The better; He shall have in orphanage
His own way all the clearer; if my babe
Outlived the hour—and he has lived two weeks—
It is through God who knows I am not by.¹

What seems to me wonderful is the absence of all anxiety or care at such a moment. Her trust in God had driven out all fear. And now I come to what I may call the peroration of her speech, though such words seem strange when we think of Pompilia. I have spoken of her love for Caponsacchi and all it meant to her, and perhaps the following quotations from the peroration, which is too long to give in full, will justify what I have said:

Well, and there is more! Yes, my end of breath
Shall bear away my soul in being true!
He is still here, not outside with the world,
Here, here, I have him in his rightful place!
'T is now, when I am most upon the move,
I feel for what I verily find—again
The face, again the eyes, again, through all,
The heart and its immeasurable love
Of my one friend, my only, all my own,
Who put his breast between the spears and me.
Ever with Caponsacchi! Otherwise
Here alone would be failure, loss to me—
How much more loss to **him**, with life debarred
From giving life, love **locked** from love's display,
The day-star stopped its task that makes night morn!
O lover of my life, O soldier-saint,
No work begun shall ever pause for death!
Love will be helpful to me more and more
I' the coming course, the new path I must tread—
My weak hand in thy strong hand, strong for that!
Tell him that if I seem without him now,

¹ P. 1749-56.

That 's the world's insight! Oh, he understands!
 He is at Civita—do I once doubt
 The world again is holding us apart?
 He had been here, displayed in my behalf
 The broad brow that reverberates the truth,
 And flashed the word God gave him, back to man!
 I know where the free soul is flown! My fate
 Will have been hard for even him to bear:
 Let it confirm him in the trust of God,
 Showing how holily he dared the deed!¹

Tell him, she says, that nothing but good and happiness came of his deed, not one jot of failure. Then, remembering that on the night of the murder Violante had opened the door on hearing the name of Caponsacchi, she adds:

Tell him,—I know not wherefore the true word
 Should fade and fall unuttered at the last—
 It was the name of him I sprang to meet
 When came the knock, the summons and the end.
 "My great heart, my strong hand are back again!"
 I would have sprung to these, beckoning across
 Murder and hell gigantic and distinct
 O' the threshold, posted to exclude me heaven:
 He is ordained to call and I to come!²

Referring later to the fact that he is a priest, she says:

He cannot marry therefore, which is right:
 I think he would not marry if he could.
 Marriage on earth seems such a counterfeit,
 Mere imitation of the inimitable:
 In heaven we have the real and true and sure.³

Continuing, she compares marriage on earth with marriage in heaven. It is clear from her words that, for her, marriage on earth has no beauty, it is but an affair of the market. But "in heaven we have the real and true and sure",

¹ P. 1771-1801.

² P. 1806-14.

³ P. 1822-6.

So, let him wait God's instant men call years;
Meantime hold hard by truth and his great soul,
Do out the duty! Through such souls alone
God stooping shows sufficient of His light
For us i' the dark to rise by. And I rise.¹

Let the reader keep this picture of Caponsacchi before his mind when he comes to the final criticism by the Pope, and ask himself which is the truer.

Here follow the speeches of the two lawyers, the first in defence of Guido, the second in defence of Pompilia. The speech of the former is given in its first rough form, "the chick in egg", that of the latter we get finished and perfect in its "absolute glory". In the first Browning gives free vent to his humour, and, I may add, its humour is its redeeming quality. I can see no redeeming point whatsoever in the second. In it "the Fisc" defends Pompilia, and his defence damns all that is pure and beautiful in her. It has been said that about half *The Ring and the Book* is not worth reading. For myself there is but one book I would willingly lose and that is the speech of the Fisc. If these two speeches give any true idea of the state of the law at that time, then indeed law had much to learn. How much time was taken up by the lawyers and their two seconds we can only guess roughly from the line,

"Thus wrangled, brangled, jangled they a month."²

Finally, the court cut short the squabbling of the lawyers and pronounced their sentence. From it we see that truth had at least gained one complete victory, that Caponsacchi's speech and Pompilia's death-bed confession had convinced the judges of her purity. Browning gives their decision thus:

¹ P. 1841-5.

² R. and B. 241.

“ Judged, your cause.

“ Receive our sentence! Praise God! We pronounce

“ Count Guido devilish and damnable:

“ His wife Pompilia in thought, word and deed,

“ Was perfect pure, he murdered her for that:

“ As for the Four who helped the One, all Five—

“ Why, let employer and hirelings share alike

“ In guilt and guilt’s reward, the death their due!”¹

But Guido’s lawyer had still a card to play. He pointed out that his client “ boasts the clerkly privilege,

“ Has taken minor orders many enough,”²

and demanded that his case should be referred to the Pope. This could not be refused and so we pass to his speech.

¹ *R. and B.* 245-52.

² *R. and B.* 261.

IX

THE POPE

The Pope speaks on the evening of Friday, the 20th of February, seven weeks exactly after the murder. Pompilia has thus been dead for at least six weeks, and during this time Guido, hoping and fearing, has awaited in his prison the final judgment on his act.

I will treat this book more fully than the others, for two reasons. My first reason is that many readers find it difficult to follow the thread of the Pope's argument, and my hope is that by means of a running paraphrase I may help to make this clearer; and I may as well point out here that we must not expect the Pope to give a conclusive answer, logically satisfactory, to all the questions he himself raises, and must not therefore conclude that we have failed to follow the argument merely because we feel at the end that we have not got from it a solution of all these problems. We must remember that he is Pope, that the first and last word with him is "faith", and that an appeal to faith may silence, but can never satisfy, the reason. Whether or not the reason has a right to demand a satisfactory answer on all points, is a question which does not concern me here. All I wish to insist upon is simply this, that the Pope does not trust to reason alone. When it fails, he finds support and strength in his faith, while the reader who follows his argument by the light of reason alone may find himself at the end dissatisfied.

My second reason for treating this book more fully is

that every reader must feel a deep interest in the character of the Pope, and this is his only appearance in the story. I have heard it declared, on what authority I cannot remember, that his speech forms the greatest book of *The Ring and the Book*. This will certainly not be the opinion of the ordinary reader. The passion and pathos of Caponsacchi's speech will give it easily the first place, and for myself I have no hesitation in pronouncing it the greater poem of the two, the greatest of the many poems which compose *The Ring and the Book*. But the figure of the Pope is unique, one of the finest pictures Browning has given us of his ideal man. He reminds us of the lines,

Grow old along with me
The best is yet to be
The last of life for which the first was made.

We feel that in him Browning was indeed painting "the good and faithful servant" faithful to the end, a man after his own heart. In the introductory book he thus describes him:

Pope Innocent the Twelfth,
Simple, sagacious, mild yet resolute,¹

.
Innocent by name
And nature too, and eighty-six years old,
Antonio Pignatelli of Naples, Pope
Who had trod many lands, known many deeds,
Probed many hearts, beginning with his own,
And now was far in readiness for God.²

He points out that it was he who ordered that the sect called Jansenists or Molinists should be no further persecuted, but left in peace, since they

"May have other light than we perceive,
"Or why is it the whole world hates them thus?"³

¹ R. and B. 1221-2.

² R. and B. 300-5.

³ R. and B. 316-7.

Note the last line, the assumption that the world will naturally hate those who bring new truth to light. The Pope was likewise so careful of the poor that it was said in jest that they were better fed than he, since

“ His own meal costs but five carlines a day,
 “ Poor-priests’ allowance, for he claims no more.” ¹

This is the man to whom Guido makes his final appeal, trusting that his known mildness and his great age may lead him to reverse the decision of the court. Browning gives us a fine picture of him in his study, after a whole day’s work at the documents relating to the trial.

The manner of his sitting out the dim
 Droop of a sombre February day
 In the plain closet where he does such work,
 With, from all Peter’s treasury, one stool,
 One table and one lathen crucifix.
 There sits the Pope, his thoughts for company;
 Grave but not sad,—nay, something like a cheer
 Leaves the lips free to be benevolent,
 Which, all day long, did duty firm and fast. ²

His work is practically done, his mind made up, but according to his custom he takes down and

Unclasps a huge tome in an antique guise. ³

The book is the record of the acts of the Popes, the precedents by which he guides himself in all matters of importance. So having a case to judge himself he seeks in his history

How judged once, well or ill, some other Pope. ⁴

And, as he comes upon the evening’s chance,
 Starts somewhat, solemnizes straight his smile,
 Then reads aloud that portion first to last. ⁵

¹ *R. and B.* 324-5.

² *R. and B.* 1235-43.

³ *R. and B.* 1250.

⁴ *Pope*, 16.

⁵ *R. and B.* 1255-7.

The passage he reads tells

How there was a ghastly Trial once
Of a dead man by a live man, and both, Popes.¹

Thus the story goes: Pope Formosus being dead, his successor, Pope Stephen VII, called him before his synod, and the dead body being brought in, accused him of having acted "against the canons of the church" in allowing himself to be made Pope. The obsequious synod found him guilty and Stephen declared him "unpopped, and all he did I damn". In addition he ordered that the body should be dragged through the streets to the market-place, that there the town hangman should chop off the three fingers with "which he blessed withal".

" 'Next cut the head off once was crowned forsooth:
" 'And last go fling them, fingers, head and trunk,
" 'To Tiber that my Christian fish may sup.' " ²

But the three Popes who succeeded, each in turn condemned Stephen's act, and the mutilated body having been found, was laid again in its place among the Popes, while the last of the three, Pope John, in full synod,

" Did condemn Stephen, anathematize
" The disinterment, and make all blots blank." ³

But the next Pope, Sergius,

" Reaffirmed
" The right of Stephen, cursed Formosus, nay
" Cast out, some say, his corpse a second time." ⁴

The chronicler adds:

" Yet constantly opinion hath prevailed
" I' the Church, Formosus was a holy man." ⁵

Thus, just at the moment when the Pope has come to his

¹ *Pope*, 29-30. ² *Pope*, 86-8. ³ *Pope*, 135-6. ⁴ *Pope*, 142-4. ⁵ *Pope*, 149-50.

final decision on a matter which will decide the life or death of five men, he is suddenly brought face to face with this record of the fallibility in judgment of his predecessors.

Which of the judgments was infallible?
Which of my predecessors spoke for God? ¹

This leads him into the long soliloquy in which he justifies to himself his decision in this case and his determination to act upon it, conscious as he is that the Pope is not always infallible. (In the following paraphrase I shall use the direct form as much simpler. Any note I think it necessary to add I shall put within brackets.)

In God's name! Once more on this earth of God's,
While twilight lasts and time wherein to work,
I take His staff with my uncertain hand,
And stay my six and fourscore years, my due
Labour and sorrow, on His judgment-seat,
And forthwith think, speak, act, in place of Him—
The Pope for Christ.²

Once more appeal is made to me by one condemned by men who demand his blood as the only means of satisfying justice.

And I am bound, the solitary judge,
To weigh the worth, decide upon the plea,
And either hold a hand out, or withdraw
A foot and let the wretch drift to the fall.³

While I thus sit dallying, as if it were possible both to grant this man a reprieve and obtain one for myself for pardoning him when I think him guilty, fancy suggests how easy it would be to grant one and save a life. Yet this is but fancy, for I am quite decided as to my course, and in reality

¹ *Pope*, 151-2.
(D 435)

² *Pope*, 163-9.

³ *Pope*, 194-7.
11

A mere dead man is Franceschini here
 Even as Formosus centuries ago.
 I have worn through this sombre wintry day,
 With winter in my soul beyond the world's,
 Over these dismalest of documents
 Which drew night down on me ere eve befell.¹

Truth, which is not to be found directly in any one of these documents, yet is to be gathered from them all and is

evolved at last
 Painfully, held tenaciously by me.²

And so there is no doubt as to what order I shall give when presently I "chink the handbell". Why do I not give it then? Am I irresolute? Not in the least. Some perhaps think that since man's wit is fallible mine may fail here. Suppose that it is so and that Guido, whom I hold guilty, is absolutely innocent, why should that make me hesitate? Suppose that, when walking in the country, some peasants recognizing me as Pope point to a man "strangling in his foam" and ask me to show my power, and I, thinking from what they tell me of the case that it is a frenzy fit, bleed the man and he shortly after dies, while the peasants return to tell me that they mistook the case, that the man had been stung by a serpent and that my bleeding slew him when a cordial might have restored him to health, what should I say in my defence but simply that I regret deeply my ignorance and mistake but cannot count it a sin in myself, since I did all I could? So should some other, more acute than I, be able to read in these documents the proof of Guido's innocence, still I should not fear to face his spirit, for God has given me only a certain ability in judging, and I leave Him to judge whether I have not used it to my utmost here. No, I hold it a much greater fault that once I changed a chaplain for no reason but to

¹ *Pope*, 210-5.

² *Pope*, 231-2.

suit my comfort as he “snuffled somewhat saying mass”. The world can judge only by externals, and to it an act is good or bad according to its fruit. But God, in judging the actor, will look only at what the man intended and tried to do and will not blame him for results he could not foresee. And so here I take my stand on my integrity and have no fear; and if I hesitate it is but to rest and breathe a while as a man must, and review my argument. This cold February day with its persistent rain has cleared the streets of gossips, but wherever they gather, two names are in their mouths, Guido’s and mine. Suppose that “sagacious Swede”, so famous for his ability in calculating the probability of events, were given the following problem, the names and rank of the persons being hidden;—there are two men in Rome to-night; one is doomed to death; but hundreds in such plight “escape because the law leans to mercy” in our time; in addition he is in full enjoyment of his health and strength, with “brain adroit”, ready to profit by any chance; he is noble too and “backed by nobler friends”, while the very city is on his side; is it not certain he will escape by bribing a gaoler or by the help of the mob? The other man, eighty-six years old, weighed down with age and with the care of a whole world under his charge, has spent himself this day “trying one question with true sweat of soul”, whether the doomed man deserves death or not; the slightest accident to this second, such as swallowing a straw in his posset, or stumbling over a stool, will be enough to kill one so aged and weak; the question then is, which of the two will die the sooner? The Swede would reply, “In all likelihood the second will die first”. But this is not so.

No, it will be quite otherwise,—to-day
Is Guido’s last: my term is yet to run.¹

¹ *Pope*, 336–7.

But suppose the Swede were right, and I died to-night, and God said to me, "Show me your latest act into which you put your heart and soul that I may judge the tree by its fruits".

I must plead

This condemnation of a man to-day.¹

But here I mislead myself; for at God's judgment bar there shall be no question and reply, no use of speech, which more than anything else shows the curse man is subject to, falling short as it always does of the truth. If the man hates or deceives, he may in defence urge that the impulse to do so was born in him, that he gave way to this impulse which was strong only because it was true, and so there is at least some core of truth in the act. But a man may speak or keep silence as he sees fit. There is therefore no need for him to lie. He cannot describe a rose, however, or the flight of birds without slipping to the false though truth would be better. Yet he speaks to his mate, knowing himself that the thing he wishes to describe in words he cannot describe truly, that is, knowing that his description will be a lie, and his mate, knowing this, accepts it for true and yet each is quite aware that it is a lie. So at God's judgment-bar speech will be done away with as unfit to express truth. (Here surely the flaw in the Pope's argument is quite apparent and marks merely his disgust at the illusive and misleading pleadings and counterpleadings over which he has spent a whole day striving to get at the truth hidden in them, and his contempt for the idea that God's method could in any way resemble this. Surely it is this that makes him forget for the moment that in great part these documents contain the words of men paid not to tell the truth, but to make a certain view appear true. The Pope could not but see, as we do, the core of truth at the root of speech,

¹ *Pope*, 345-6.

the real effort to attain truth in the use of it, and if, as he says, God will judge us by what we really strive to do and not by the product, surely the man who strives to describe the rose is aiming at truth and his failure is through ignorance, not sin; and to call this failure a lie, as the Pope does, is to judge by the fruits, after the manner of the world, and not by the intention, which he holds to be the method of God.) But, he continues, let me in this life use speech, the method of men. Before I was made Pope I studied God and man for long years under different conditions and in different lands. Let me imagine that I, Antonio Pignatelli, as I then was, the man grown old in the world, inquisitive and impartial, question the man now Pope, the same Antonio Pignatelli, grey and worn with age, yet more sensible, as age wears away the flesh and leaves the soul freer, of the divine presence. Let Me as I am justify my decision in this case to Me as I was. Here then are my reasons for deciding against Guido.

He begins his career in this world furnished with nearly all which we think necessary to guide life aright,

Body and mind in balance, a sound frame,
A solid intellect: the wit to seek,
Wisdom to choose, and courage wherewithal
To deal in whatsoever circumstance
Should minister to man, make life succeed.¹

He has of course his drawbacks too. Earth would not be earth without them; for this world is but the place where man must learn his craft, work out his apprenticeship. Here it is the difficulties that show the worth of the man, prove whether he will be content to lie low in the slime, or turn the seeming obstacles into "stepping-stones to higher things"; and so Guido is poor though wealth seems necessary to one in his position. In addition he seems to feel less

¹ *Pope*, 403-7.

than men in general the instinctive repugnance to grasp greedily at all he can reach; a feeling which nature plants in man to make the first step aside from the true path more difficult than the right, that he may at least take the first step in life's march correctly.

This, however, is for Guido but a fair trial to balance the advantages he has in life's conflict, his high birth, education, and, more than these, instruction in a religion which teaches just that

"Man is born nowise to content himself,
But please God."¹

He accepted this rule of religion; nay, more; the Church being just the embodiment of this rule, he entered her service, becoming as much of a priest as a layman may. But why? Simply that when he sinned he might claim the protection of the Church. Thus we see here that, when law has caught him in a crime for which blood alone can atone, his last hope of escape lies in his being partly a churchman, and so he appeals to me to save him. This man then, this parasite of religion, is just the one who proves most irreligious. Does he plead in excuse that religion lost its hold over him because it was so continually dinned into his ear? Why then did he enter the pale of the Church at all, but that he felt that religion would prove a safe cloak for concealing crime, that his professed devotion to the Church would shield him from suspicion? Thus his excuse is but his condemnation. The nearer he is to the Church the blacker is his crime. As I have said then, he ought with all his advantages of birth, education, and religion to have begun life well. These, however, he uses but as a coat of proof to shield him from the world. Whenever danger appears and men turn on him with suspicion, Guido poses as the nobleman, the man of education, the partisan

¹ *Pope*, 435-6.

of the Church. But the moment the danger is past he drops this disguise, plunges into the slime of the world, takes his place as "trickster if not cut-purse", and when he is at last caught by law at his ignoble work, red-handed from his crime, he turns and points to his cloak of nobility, education, and religion as if the cloak were indeed himself.

Nay, it is thou, law prongs amid thy peers,
Congenial vermin; that was none of thee,
Thine outside.¹

What damns Guido is simply the fact

That he believes in just the vile of life.²

But if "low instinct" and "base pretension" are the truth of life, then the very nobility and religion behind which he tries to conceal himself are lies and for himself they certainly are so. This creed of his we see exemplified in his last deliberate act, his marriage. This, then, as his last complete work in the world, and thus as completely showing the soul of the man, this I separate from his life and will try and test him by it, judging him accordingly. Of all the "permissible" impulses which should lead men to marriage

From the mere liking of the eye and ear,
To the true longing of the heart that loves,³

we find no trace in him. He knew what were held to be the best motives and pretended to be moved by them. But his real motive was the worst that can move man, that which sinks him beneath the "level of the brute", the mere lust for gold, for which he is ready to lie, rob, and murder if necessary. He is ready to use the pretence of love as the lure, with gold as the aim, ready to wring it from his victims by torture, gold being the one good he can get from

¹ *Pope*, 508-10.

² *Pope*, 512.

³ *Pope*, 538-9.

man. 'This got, he might, he thinks, lead the life he would like to live, though what kind of life this would be we must judge from the nature of the man. To get this gold from the victims with least noise is the ideal. Guido paints to himself a picture of the father and mother silenced and dumb in his hands, and finally driven forth penniless by his cruelty, no longer witnesses of how he treats their child, his wife, who lies like a slave in his power to be first used then destroyed. This scheme he set himself deliberately to accomplish and so undertook the marriage

in God's face
With all these lies so opposite God's truth,
For end so other than man's end.¹

But, when he finds that he holds no monopoly of tricks and lying, when the Comparini publish in Rome the tale of Pompilia's birth and his cruelty, which for the time ruins his scheme, then he prepares for a higher flight, a deed which seems the very "flower of wickedness". He plans now to glut his vengeance on Pompilia, though conscious that she is innocent of any offence against him, and thus to punish the Comparini. It is worthy of note, too, that he always subordinates

Revenge, the manlier sin, to interest
The meaner,²

his vengeance being but a means to an end, the gaining of the coveted gold. He aims at driving her by torture into open sin and shame which would ruin her, ruin the happiness of the Comparini, leave his claims on their wealth intact, himself free from any danger, and his name unsullied before the world. He strives thus by persistent torture to drive her to fly for safety to the arms of some lover, but, when the crisis of the torment arrives, he finds his cruelty

¹ *Pope*, 570-2.

² *Pope*, 600-1.

foiled by her simple purity. She lies, "resigned to die"; cannot be driven to the way of sin;

O God,
Who shall pluck sheep Thou holdest, from thy hand? ¹

Foiled so far, he now brings craft to supplement,
Cruelty and show hell a masterpiece, ²

and works out "this consummate lie, this love intrigue", these letters, false not merely in the forged writing and names, but false utterly to the characters they pretend to image forth. He attains his end in so far that Caponsacchi and Pompilia are brought together in a way foreign to the true place of wife and priest. Thus there is the meeting at her window, a meeting fraught with passion and temptation, as if heaven and hell strove for victory. They stood—a spectacle for angels. The world shall never know how great was the trial, how great the victory gained there, how complete the overthrow of Satan, or the window would be worshipped as a shrine and the pavement beneath as holy ground.

Why repine?
What does the world, told truth, but lie the more? ³

Thus a second time the plot is foiled, not by a corresponding sin, but by the perfect purity of a woman, while courage, "No woman's gift nor priest's", "sprang up in defence of their new noble nature". In the meeting at Castelnovo, Guido quails and cowers before the eye of the priest.

There skulks crime
Behind law called in to back cowardice;
While out of the poor trampled worm the wife,
Springs up a serpent!" ⁴

And here, I note, this second foiling of the plot gives Guido

¹ *Pope*, 641-2.

² *Pope*, 646.

³ *Pope*, 672-3.

⁴ *Pope*, 697-700.

a second chance of seeing the evil of his life, and of amending "ere punishment arrive". The law to which he appeals judges aright in the main, liberating Pompilia from his oppression. Thus is the chance of probation granted him, thus may his soul be purified of its baser elements under the scourge of public scorn and private remorse, and thus he may come to feel how immense has been his mistake; for man, even if he must sin, need not strive to attain his ends by means so utterly base and unmanly. Guido, however, but sinks the deeper, and foiled so far seeks still baser means to accomplish his end. "Craft, greed and violence complot revenge." His craft aims at seizing a suitable occasion which will not endanger his person. In his greed he plots the death not of one but three, thus to clear his path to all their wealth. Lastly, his cruel nature suggests the Genoese dagger that death may be accompanied by the maximum of pain. And the occasion of this scheme, this eruption from the vilest depths of hate, is the birth of his first child, his son and heir. Other men at such a time recognize God's love with thankful hearts. But Guido cries, "Now is my chance. The hated lives I feared to touch lest I should lose their wealth, are now at my mercy, for my child is heir to all they have. Now that there is no chance of losing the gold I covet, now let me glut my hate." He calls to his help four young peasants, of that simple colourless nature which bards are wont to hold up as a pattern to men corrupted by modern artificial life. But note how they catch fire at a touch from Guido, are ready at once at the offer of gold to work his will. They arrive at Rome on Christmas Eve.

Oh angels that sang erst "On the earth, peace!
To man, good will!"—such peace finds earth to-day!
After the seventeen hundred years, so man
Wills good to man, so Guido makes complete
His murder! ¹

¹ *Pope*, 789-93.

But the murder once achieved, what is it that baulks him of his complete triumph, the escape which was to have crowned all? The world can never quite conceal nor yet quite reveal the secret working of God, which thus, as ever, trips up sin lest it exceed the limit. Thus Guido is tripped up by the simplest oversight, forgetfulness of what he knew best, the mere slip of paper which he could have had for the asking, and with which he could have procured horses, escaped across the Tuscan frontier, laughed in his safety and triumph, and told the story of his deed to his peers prepared to applaud him. Yes, I imagine he curses the oversight more than the murder. Fool that he is, he does not see that once again he is granted respite for repentance; for, but for the oversight, he would have died that night at the hands of his servants who had plotted to murder him for having in his greed withheld their promised reward.

Such I find Guido, midmost blotch of black
Discernible in this group of clustered crimes
Huddling together in the cave they call
Their palace outraged day thus penetrates.¹

(Here the Pope sums up shortly the characters of Paolo, Girolamo, and their mother. As I have already quoted these I pass to the next. But I would draw attention to the occasional bitterness of the Pope's satire as he turns from character to character and finds none worthy of praise.)

Last,

These God-abandoned wretched lumps of life,
These four companions,—country-folk this time,
Not tainted by the unwholesome civic breath,
Much less the curse o' the Court! Mere striplings too,
Fit to do human nature justice still! ²

¹ Pope, 869-72.

^a *Pope*, 925-30.

Surely when Guido shall ask these "stout, tall, rough, bright-eyed, black-haired boys" to aid him in the murder and offer them money, surely they will treat the offer as an insult? They are but done with the healthy harvest work and winter is near "with rest and Christmas play", and surely are far from being in the mood for such a crime? Yet, when Guido proposes the murder of three people quite unknown to them, and offers them pay, they agree as readily as if he but proposed to dig one more vineyard. And this willingness to help is no outcome of the old feudal system, is due to no feeling of duty to the lord of the land,

Not so at all, thou noble human heart!
All is done purely for the pay,¹

as is seen from their plot to murder Guido because the pay is not handed over quickly enough. Once they had murdered him and rifled his purse, what was to hinder them from returning with new zest to their former peasant life?

Till some such other piece of luck betide,
Who knows? Since this is a mere start in life,
And none of them exceeds the twentieth year.²

And in the background here are still more of the actors in this tragedy, deserving "to be classed, subordinately vile", "those complacent lookers-on", while Guido works his will on Pompilia, who

perchance

Shake head as their friend's horse-play grows too rough
With the mere child he manages amiss—
But would not interfere and make bad worse
For twice the fractious tears and prayers.³

Take for example this Governor, this Marzi-Medici, this representative of the law,

¹ *Pope*, 951-2.

² *Pope*, 962-4.

³ *Pope*, 967-71.

Whose answer to the couple's cry for help
Is a threat,—whose remedy of Pompilia's wrong,
A shrug o' the shoulder, and facetious word
Or wink, traditional with Tuscan wits,
To Guido in the doorway.¹

Thus Pompilia is thrust back to her husband, to him who understands how unseemly it is to disturb the silence of the law-courts established for the public good with these home-squabbings.

Ah, but I save my word at least for thee
Archbishop, who art under me i' the Church,
As I am under God,—thou, chosen by both
To do the shepherd's office, feed the sheep—
How of this lamb that panted at thy foot
While the wolf pressed on her within crook's reach?
Wast thou the hireling that did turn and flee?
With thee at least anon the little word! ²

These are the denizens of the cave, and time it is that the world should see Guido doomed and the others branded with their shame, and that this den of wickedness should be flooded with light from without, for however dark the night of evil there is ever to be seen some "stray beauty beam" from the world of light beyond.

First of the first,
Such I pronounce Pompilia, then as now
Perfect in whiteness: stoop thou down, my child,
Give one good moment to the poor old Pope
Heart-sick at having all his world to blame—
Let me look at thee in the flesh,³

as thou wert on earth, as at times I turn with joy from the splendid vesture of the Pope to the clean linen garb I wore as priest. Everywhere in the world around I see evidence of man's intellect, energy, and knowledge.

¹ *Pope*, 977-81.

² *Pope*, 986-93.

³ *Pope*, 1004-9.

But they make not up, I think,
 The marvel of a soul like thine, earth's flower
 She holds up to the softened gaze of God!
 It was not given Pompilia to know much,
 Speak much, to write a book, to move mankind,
 Be memorized by who records my time.¹

But if in purity, patience, and unconquerable faith, in
 returning good for evil and "pardon for worst injury"—
 if in these

there be any virtue, any praise,—
 Then will this woman-child have proved—who knows?—
 Just the one prize vouchsafed unworthy me,
 Seven years a gardener of the untoward ground,
 I till,—this earth, my sweat and blood manure
 All the long day that barrenly grows dusk:
 At least one blossom makes me proud at eve
 Born 'mid the briers of my enclosure! Still
 (Oh, here as elsewhere, nothingness of man!)²

see how weak and timid are the plants I tended and watched
 with care,

While—see how this mere chance-sown cleft-nursed seed
 That sprang up by the wayside 'neath the foot
 Of the enemy, this breaks all into blaze,
 Spreads itself, one wide glory of desire
 To incorporate the whole great sun it loves
 From the inch-height whence it looks and longs! My flower,
 My rose, I gather for the breast of God,
 This I praise most in thee, where all I praise,³

that having been proved perfect in all obedience to the
 foolish parents, the bad husband, and even his servants
 who worked his will on thee, thou couldst see at once
 where the higher law superseded the old, where the duty
 of obedience to man gave way to the higher duty of re-
 sistance to man for the sake of thy unborn child. What

¹ *Pope*, 1017-22.

² *Pope*, 1028-36.

³ *Pope*, 1041-8.

wonder would it have been if long obedience to the one law had dulled thine ear to the higher call and thou hadst hesitated to act upon a law which seemed to contradict the rule of thy whole life.

But, brave,
Thou at first prompting of what I call God,
And fools call Nature, didst hear, comprehend,
Accept the obligation laid on thee,
Mother elect, to save the unborn child,¹

as do all forms of life even to the flower of the field, I verily believe. Thou didst resist, yes, and defend him also who had come to thy help. He, less proved than thou in obedience in the past, "less practised in the right", might well have hesitated before the call thou hadst received.

(This passage refers of course to Caponsacchi, and, as we have seen, he did hesitate at first between the old law represented by the Church and the new law represented in the service Pompilia demanded. In the whole of the soliloquy of the Pope there seems to me nothing so beautiful as his humility in the last few words of the following quotation from the close of his remarks on Pompilia.)

It was authentic to the experienced ear
O' the good and faithful servant. Go past me
And get thy praise,—and be not far to seek
Presently when I follow if I may!²

And surely not so very much apart
Need I place thee, my warrior-priest,—in whom
What if I gain the other rose, the gold,
We grave to imitate God's miracle,
Greet monarchs with, good rose in its degree?
Irregular noble scapegrace—son the same!
Faulty—and peradventure ours the fault,³

who think by a little formal teaching to make the weaklings

¹ *Pope*, 1072-6.

² *Pope*, 1091-4.

³ *Pope*, 1095-1101.

of the world fit to cope with and tame the monarch of evil. Better would it be were our teaching more humble; better for a while to leave the "King of Pride" to wander at his will. God who made him will also in due time bring forth his conqueror nor lose the praise. Who but God created the human heart from which at the first call for help springs forth

the chivalry
That dares the right and disregards alike
The yea and nay o' the world? ¹

Is not self-sacrifice a virtue even if offered to an idol? Did not the Church turn each Venus, round whom she found the affections of Rome lingering with a sort of blind love, into a Madonna, that so divine a thing as love might not be lost? But this fine chivalry was the natural product of thine own heart, my son, not a virtue instilled in thee by the Church "whose function was to give" it.

Do I smile?
Nay, Caponsacchi, much I find amiss,
Blameworthy, punishable, ²

in the life thou hast led during the last few years, this life as churchman and worldling, this mixture of hypocrisy and buffoonery. Which was the more suitable garb for thee

With that symmetric soul inside my son,
'The churchman's or the worldling's? ³

But this faultfinding I leave for our enemy, "who enjoys the task".

I rather chronicle the healthy rage,—
When the first moan broke from the martyr-maid
At that uncaging of the beasts,—made bare
My athlete on the instant, gave such good
Great undisguised leap over post and pale
Right into the mid-cirque, free fighting-place. ⁴

¹ *Pope*, 1114-6.

² *Pope*, 1127-9.

³ *Pope*, 135-6.

⁴ *Pope*, 1138-43.

He may in his eagerness have rashly infringed many of the laws prescribed by the Church. Thou, my son, must bear this accusation and undergo also the conventional penalty and rebuke.

I nowise dare relax,—

.
But for the outcome, the brave starry birth
Conciliating earth with all that cloud,
Thank Heaven as I do!¹

Yes, we shall wait long and vainly for

such championship
Of God at first blush, such prompt cheery thud
Of glove on ground that answers ringingly
The challenge of the false knight,²

from those whom we have appointed for such work, decking them in white for sanctity and red to show their willingness to shed their blood for their faith. Where then were these our chosen soldiers "with cross on coat" at the moment of need? Standing aloof, traitors to the cross they bore,

whilst thou
In mask and motley, pledged to dance not fight,
Sprang'st forth the hero! In thought, word and deed,
How throughout all thy warfare thou wast pure,
I find it easy to believe.³

Did the passion and pathos of that strange adventure tempt sorely the love of the human heart in thee, revealing as it did

The perfect beauty of the body and soul
Thou savedst in thy passion for God's sake,
He who is Pity. Was the trial sore?
Temptation sharp? Thank God a second time!⁴

Temptation comes but as the opportunity granted to the

¹ *Pope*, 1152-6.
(D 435)

² *Pope*, 1156-9.

³ *Pope*, 1167-71.

⁴ *Pope*, 1181-4.
12

man of mastering it and rising above it in triumph. We pray,

“Lead us into no such temptations, Lord!”¹

but we should add,

O thou whose servants are the bold,
Lead such temptations by the head and hair,
Reluctant dragons, up to who dares fight,
That so he may do battle and have praise!²

Yes, great is the praise thou hast gained here, my son; for while our soldiers chosen for such work showed that their continual training had but rendered them too stiff for real battle, while their ear dulled by hearing continually the word of command failed to catch the call to battle when it came unexpectedly,

Thou, whose sword-hand was used to strike the lute,
Whose sentry-station graced some wanton's gate,
Thou didst push forward and show mettle, shame
The laggards, and retrieve the day. Well done!³

Rejoice that by this strange adventure, this breaking through the prescribed limits, thou hast brought new light into the world. And now, keeping ever this light upon thy path, march on “assured”,

Learning anew the use of soldiership,
Self-abnegation, freedom from all fear,
Loyalty to the life's end! Ruminating,
Deserve the initiatory spasm,—once more
Work, be unhappy but bear life, my son!
And troop you, somewhere 'twixt the best and worst,
Where crowd the indifferent product, all too poor
Makeshift, starved samples of humanity!
Father and mother, huddle there and hide!
A gracious eye may find you! Foul and fair,

¹ *Pope*, 1188.

² *Pope*, 1189-92.

³ *Pope*, 1201-4

Sadly mixed natures: self-indulgent,—yet
Self-sacrificing too: how the love soars,
How the craft, avarice, vanity and spite
Sink again!¹

Thus, foolish alike in their crime and their virtue, they keep a sort of middle course, lacking sufficient decision of character to enable me to class them either with the evil or the good. Your sudden and terrible death taught with unwonted sternness the danger of this middle course, your one sin against Guido bringing his hate upon you as surely as Pompilia's blameless life. And yet it was your honest love, that which was purest in you, that betrayed you. Was it that this alone in your nature seemed worthy of the purification by pain, as it alone was ordained to survive? Remember for the future that good cannot neutralize the evil in man. Each will be judged and receive its just award, nor can the one compensate for the other,

Life's business being just the terrible choice.²

Thus then do I pronounce judgment on all these brought before me here, professing no doubt while I speak. The work, it is true, is difficult, but practice makes a man expert, and I, with no gift beyond the powers of the ordinary man, separate the true from the false as a mere man may. Nay, according to popular report, I am one of well-nigh decayed intelligence. Even if that were so, my long experience, my hard day's labour and earnest endeavour have led me to what I hold true, and so I dare give my sentence, whatever be the peril of mistake. Whence then comes this strange cold thrill of fear, that saps my energy and leaves me for the moment powerless to do the act which, however, should and shall be done? While thus in the world I decide upon the right and wrong of each act and praise or punish accordingly, suppose someone says to me in derision, "Yes,

¹ *Pope*, 1208-21.

² *Pope*, 1138.

it is very just that you with your superior intelligence should ply men with tasks and give the deserving their due of wages and praise. But punishment is another thing. Do you dare to condemn Guido thus, because he has failed to see his act as you see it, when he lacks the very light by which you see? You who decide thus boldly, turn your eyes upon the deeper problems of faith and doubt, problems that question the very existence of God. What will you say if you find yourself lost in the darkness, unable to see the very God for offence against whose laws you judge Franceschini guilty? You know these questions are yet unanswered, and is it for you then to go on judging the world above which you stand as Pope, and never once dare to turn your eyes towards the darkness above, the scepticism which questions the nature of the power which rules? How should I reply to this, except by saying that my knowledge of God comes from seeing Him through faith and from this source I have drawn all my strength? "All that I do and am" comes from truth gained by observation, by thought, or from the records of other men. This is all I know, all I can know, and I must speak or act according to my knowledge. But suppose the light of faith were misleading and all that I hold as true concerning the nature and laws of God were false; suppose the God in whom I trust were but a product, a creation of my faith, how then should I speak or act? Shall I, who in this world unhesitatingly "dispose of men their bodies and their souls" according as they obey or disobey what I hold to be the laws of God, and blame those who fear the struggle which strengthens the soul,—shall I shirk this problem and show them that I also fear

To grapple danger whereby souls grow strong?
I am near the end; but still not at the end;
All to the very end is trial in life.¹

¹ *Pope*, 1302-4.

But what is the real trial here? It is sometimes our duty to face the danger but sometimes also our duty to refuse to face it. Is it then my duty here to face this doubt or put it behind me? Thou our God art infinite and man's conception of Thee in his finite mind is but like the image of the sky formed by a convex glass from the scattered rays of light. Thou in reality art the immensity beyond our conception, our idea of Thee is but the image we form reduced to suit the limitations of our minds. In reality Thou art "appreciable solely to Thyself", but man may comprehend Thee up to the limits of his faculties; nor can man alone do this, but all life, beast, bird, insect, and plant, for why is there life at all if not to love Thee, and how can any life love Thee except so far as it knows Thee? Each life is but a mirror to reflect Thee, and as each mirror is full to its limits the greatness of the image depends but on the size of the mirror. So with all forms of life, angel and insect alike. "If new philosophy know aught", there are multitudes of peopled worlds, but Thou hast chosen this earth as the one on which to display "Thy transcendent act", beside which the work of creation seems but a puny exercise of Thy power, and similarly Thou hast chosen me as Thy representative here on earth for this present time. The choice in each case, incomprehensible as it is to us, is Thine. "I therefore bow my head and take Thy place." Beside Thy works there is a "tale of Thee" recorded by the world. I find it credible and love it with my heart. Unsatisfied, however, I try it with my reason, accepting each point I find sound.

Mind is not matter, nor the product of matter, but above it. Let us leave matter and consider mind, and let us take man's mind as the highest form of it we know. But is he even as strong, intelligent, and good as the ideal he conceives? By no means. Let us then take his ideal, his conception of God, and try to conceive the nature of God from

the character of his "work i' the world". We find in this world ample evidence of Godlike strength and intelligence. But is there also evidence of "goodness in a like degree"? No, not at least to the human eye. But this tale of Christ's death, does it not supply just what we need to make up the perfection fit for God, the proof of the existence "of love without a limit?" Thus we have infinite strength, infinite intelligence, and love "unlimited in its self-sacrifice". So the manifestation of God in His work is complete. Beyond this "I reach into the dark, feel what I cannot see", and my faith still stands firm. But for it the sin and sorrow of this world would confound me. We may guess at least, yes, and find it worthy of belief that God at a greater expenditure of pain on His own part than we can conceive, devised all the pain of this world as the one means of developing man's moral nature; for how else could it be developed but through pain? This He devised to make man love and be beloved, to make him creative in act and self-sacrificing, "and thus eventually Godlike". So He enables men to rise through the suffering of this world to the eternal happiness of heaven. All this, I say, may be surmised. God's nature, however, as I have said, is revealed in His works, and what does it matter to us so long as our intelligence is filled by the revelation, whether it is a complete revelation of God as He really is or one reduced to suit the limitations of our mind? The truth remains the same, changed only so far as it is affected by the nature of the conceiving mind. To one grade of mind, therefore, it may be quite unknown though easily conceivable by the mind in the grade above it, just as what is unknown to the beast is known to man. Thus a child thinks the sea is angry because it roars and that frost bites because of the marks it leaves on the skin. Man by the study of sound and chemistry explains away, satisfactorily to his reason, both the anger of the sea and the biting of the frost: but

though he gives a different cause for the roar of the sea, the sound is the same to his ear as to the child's. What does it matter then whether my image of God represents Him as he really is or only as my mind is able to conceive Him, so long as it is really an image of God? Nor am I at all troubled by various difficulties arising "in the transmitting of the tale" of the gospel. "No, nor with certain riddles set to solve." This life is a process of training. If truth lay open to our gaze to be obtained without strife, how could man, to whom the strife is necessary for the development of his powers, make any progress? Thus advance is always over the obstacle we have made give way before us.

The moral sense grows but by exercise.¹

It is just as if man grew more divine step by step, having been "set to make a fairer moral world than this he finds" and to guess at the truth now which he will know hereafter.

Deal

Thus with the present problem: as we see,
A faultless creature is destroyed, and sin
Has had its way i' the world where God should rule.²

And, but for the legal inquiry after the murder, Pompilia would have been lost and Guido saved for his whole life, and what a whole life may mean, knowing as we do the value of even a minute, we cannot judge.

Nor does it much astonish me that what I receive and trust, other men of like nature to myself reject and disbelieve, sin with no fear of the future. This but follows from what I have said, that earth is not the goal but the starting-point of man's probation. The one thing that is necessary is that man should *strive* to attain the ideal. To put it paradoxically, the striving is the attaining. What

¹ Pope, 1415.

² Pope, 1419-22.

then would be the use of giving man this period of probation if he were at the same time compelled to strive, since his development depends on his *choosing* the strife? Nor does it astonish me that the truth of the gospel should be let alone by men whose main interest is in other things, nor that some examine it and turn from it in contempt. But this does indeed move me to terror, that when it is once found and named and known, those who thus have the truth and know its inestimable value should seem to feel a new zest in turning to wallow in the filth of this world. In Pompilia's case, for instance, how did the Christians behave themselves? Take this Aretine Archbishop whom I raised to his high post, and armed with power, that he might show the world how evil should be conquered. Pompilia comes to him for help, and he who should be the champion of the weak, fearing Guido's power, thrusts her back into his clutches. Has our discipline here been at fault? Have we by overarming him weakened him? Would a sterner discipline have strengthened him? Take then the monk to whom Pompilia went in her need. He has lived the hard ascetic life, "fasting, watching, stone-cell and wire-scourge"; no effeminate discipline this. He promises to write for Pompilia, but fearing the world, breaks his promise and leaves her to break her heart. And these, be it noted, are the Christians, not the worldlings or the sceptics. What wonder then if the world forget the faith when those who are pledged and armed to defend it thus shamefully shirk their duty! But, since in union there is strength, let us take the "monastery called of Convertites", which is meant to help women because these helped Christ and so exists only so far as it fulfils its function.

Pompilia is consigned to these for help.
They do help: they are prompt to testify
To her pure life and saintly dying days.¹

¹ Pope, 1504-6.

But on her death they discover that she is rich and at once "the kiss turns bite". When any woman whom they have succoured dies and is proved to have been of dishonest life, her goods, whatever they are, go by law to the monastery. And so by the Fisc's advice they now lay claim to all Pompilia's property, alleging that the trial had made manifest their right to it. Before her death they declared her a saint. But is there a chance of wealth? at once they make their claim, slandering the dead, striving to cheat her infant of its rights;

They unsay

All the fine speeches,—who was saint is whore.¹

There is no parallel for this in scripture. And is this all I have to show God as the result of my stewardship? Christ died seventeen hundred years ago for men and is this all the sacrifice has produced? Is the effect here proportionate to the cause? And more terrible still to me is it that the fault is evidently not due to the nature of man as man; for we have often seen love and faith spring forth in the hearts of men in the past, and, what is more, they spring forth as readily to-day; but how are they called forth? Not, alas! by that very training by which the Church seeks to develop them.

For see this priest, this Caponsacchi, stung
At the first summons,—“ Help for honour's sake,
Play the man, pity the oppressed!”—no pause,
How does he lay about him in the midst,
Strike any foe, right wrong at any risk,
All blindness, bravery and obedience!—blind?
Ay, as a man would be inside the sun,
Delirious with the plenitude of light
Should interfuse him to the finger-ends—
Let him rush straight, and how shall he go wrong?²

While the Christian soldiers we armed for the fight, where

¹ *Pope*, 1523-4.

² *Pope*, 1556-65.

are they? "Slunk into corners." Yes, I hear the immediate protestations from monks and friars, their tales of how they have fought and bled for the Church in distant lands. But how can I help replying? You who are armed with all the power of the Church should either surpass all in the race, or give it up in shame, and is it not true that for each act of bravery you can quote I can quote another done "at an instinct of the natural man"?

And is this little all that was to be?
Where is the gloriously-decisive change,
Metamorphosis the immeasurable
Of human clay to divine gold, we looked
Should, in some poor sort, justify its price? ¹

Was it not God Himself

Who undertook to make and made the world,
Devised and did effect man, body and soul,
Ordained salvation for them both, and yet . . .
Well, is the thing we see, salvation? ²

I put no such dreadful question to myself. I see within the world of my experience the proofs of God's Power, Wisdom, and Goodness, and so long as these remain my faith in Him stands sure. While I see these I cannot but cry to all that all will yet be well, that though clouds obscure the sun it will yet break forth and shine on us. And is it so sure that the clouds are an evil? Do they not beautify heaven? "The soft streaks are the beautiful and dear"; and is it not the same with faith? Where would be the trial, the strife, necessary for probation were faith irresistible in its strength?

How can man love but what he yearns to help? ³

Is it not the very presence of weakness that brings home

¹ *Pope*, 1614-8.

² *Pope*, 1627-30.

³ *Pope*, 1652.

to him the need of sacrificing himself for others, and thus leads him to follow in Christ's footsteps, and is it not this very weakness in faith then that produces our strength?

So, never I miss footing in the maze,
No,—I have light nor fear the dark at all.¹

But what of mankind who stand outside the Christian Faith, must I not hear their cry also? Suppose now, Euripides, the ancient bard and philosopher, could come to life, would he not address me thus? God alone can judge and appraise a man's work from the inward side, his intentions and strivings, just as the engineer alone knows how much to expect from the engine. Men praise the outward product, and when we see something done which is beyond our powers we say it is "a feat beyond man's force". Judge me and my work then from that point of view. Born as I was long before the birth of Christ, according to your own faith salvation was impossible for me. There was nothing to lead me to aim at the good and the true, since I was born to perish like the brutes or indeed doomed to a worse fate than they. Why then should I not have lived a brutish life, obeyed "brute's law"?

"But I, of body as of soul complete,
"A gymnast at the games, philosopher
"I' the schools, who painted, and made music,
.
.
.
.
.
.
.
.
.
.
"Whose lot fell in a land where life was great
"And sense went free and beauty lay profuse,"²

having no reward to expect for it,

"Adopted virtue as my rule of life,
"Waived all reward, loved but for loving's sake."³

Five hundred years before Paul spoke I had already dis-

¹ *Pope*, 1659-60.

² *Pope*, 1703-9.

³ *Pope*, 1711-2.

covered and was teaching most of his doctrine. And as a painter

“ Who draws an object round or square, which square
“ Or round seems to the unassisted eye,”¹

paints “ not untruly ” though the telescope show the object to be “ oval or oblong ”, so, though Paul’s picture corrects mine, mine was true for me and as true as I could make it. Here was my scheme. There were

“ first and above all,
“ The hidden forces, blind necessities,
“ Named Nature,”²

though what Nature really was I could not conceive; next came what I called the gods, dependent upon these but in what manner I knew not, and ruling over us as we knew well; whether we say gods or God does not matter, but the ruling power showed many qualities, such as greatness, strength and goodness, littleness, weakness and wickedness, wisdom and folly. Do you say these make no God? What is it then that the eye of man, unassisted by the light of the gospel, sees ruling in the world outside himself? This, as you allow, was the one revelation possible to me. Therefore I held that man could criticize the actions of the gods, for why should he fear to speak the truth? but also, that he should regard the gods above him with awe, because of their power, and venerate them for their munificence, and, where there was any doubt, that man “ the creature of a day ” should hesitate to criticize “ the Eternal and Divine ”. Thus I held that man should be both bold and “ self-mistrusting ”—most assured regarding the law of this life, which is the most important thing for him while he lives,

which law is virtue and not vice, I say,³

¹ *Pope*, 1728-9.

² *Pope*, 1734-6.

³ *Pope*, 1757.

and least inquisitive regarding the nature of the gods where our search produces least fruit. What more could you expect me to teach in those ages which you call dark? You have the sunrise now and can point out my faults, but let us see what advance you have made. The hidden forces and necessity which I called Nature you call God, while my various gods you call just the varied manifestations of your one God, His actions translated so as to be intelligible to us. Yes, but where is the advance?

- "What if I let a child think, childhood-long,
- "That lightning, I would have him spare his eye,
- "Is a real arrow shot at naked orb?
- "The man knows more, but shuts his lids the same:
- "Lightning's cause comprehends nor man nor child."¹

Is not this just our relative positions? You have just broken up my scheme and then readjusted it on larger proportions and renamed it, but do you understand it any better?

- "So much, no more two thousand years have done!
- "Pope, dost thou dare pretend to punish me,
- "For not descrying sunshine at midnight,
- "Me who crept all-fours, found my way so far—
- "While thou rewardest teachers of the truth,
- "Who miss the plain way in the blaze of noon."²

Why, had they but taken one of my strong precepts and honestly acted up to it, it would have led them right, while here with all the light of the gospel to lead them what are they but cowards and liars?

How should I answer this Euripides?³

Is it that we have grown too familiar with the faith and no longer feel its power? Would it be better to have back the time of the dawn of truth, when new to man it thrilled him through, when he with all the certainty of a new faith

¹ Pope, 1772-6.

² Pope, 1780-5.

³ Pope, 1791.

felt that his martyrdom would hasten the coming of Christ, that he himself would pass at once "from glory of pain to glory of joy" in heaven, and that so the renunciation of all that he loved and that was dear to him in this world would lead at once to gain a hundredfold, his finite love blending and becoming one with the eternal life, that he would pass from this life to the next as the mid-summer sun in the northern regions dips below the horizon for but a moment and then rises again to begin the day? Is this certainty of faith too easy a way for our later times, and was it allowed at the beginning merely that man might get his feet set on the true path? Is it ordained that he must learn to follow this path seeing the heavenly light gradually encroached on by the light of earth, finding the freshness of his faith fade in the whirl of this world which puts forward its own selfish ideals to mislead; that, for instance, instead of serving God because of his love of God and thus most truly serving men, he should serve God selfishly aiming but at the reward? Thus at last many can with difficulty distinguish the true from the false, the sun of faith from the fire blazing on a distant hill before the idols of this earth. But is it not more praiseworthy now in the man who can in such a time keep steadfastly the true path? The last to tread this path is thus indeed the first in merit. At the dawn of our faith how could man fail to see the truth when in the night of ignorance it burst upon him in all its freshness, when in addition persecution made it clear to all the world? But now in the confusing lights it is no longer so clear. Now the way of Christ is indeed hard to follow, when the world declares with a smile that it is after all the most politic, leads most certainly to the loaves and fishes which all men wish; that the worldlings who leave the path of faith and "dance thro' the cornfield of this life" are simply treading some of their corn under-foot and will have all the smaller harvest, while the Chris-

tian who keeps the path wastes nothing and will be all the wealthier; but this, the world adds, is of little account, for though not so wealthy the worldling will always have enough for his needs. This is what makes the old heroism so difficult, this debased ideal and ignoble confidence in the good things of this life. But may it not be that the mission of the age, which will follow my death, will be just to rouse the Christian world from the sleep of security into which it has been lulled, by reintroducing the doubts and difficulties? We have made our city of faith so secure that the watchmen have all gone to sleep. Shall we find in the next age the enemy once more raging outside and the Christians once again at their post, roused by the danger, "pale, resolute, prepared to die", the soul within once more awake and full of life? Is it that our faith has attached itself to the form of our religion, forgetful of the truth of which the form is but a sign, and is it this false faith the new age will destroy, giving men courage to reject the form because of the renewed faith in the truth which the form has belied? Must we give up our recognized truths, urged by some higher truth not yet recognized but beginning to be perceived? Must we correct our creeds, our definitions of God, by the real image of God we find in the mind of man? But at what a terrible cost will this change be made! A few like Pompilia even in such times, "E'en ere new law speak clear", will remain truly Christian, distinguishing the good from the evil, however "razed and blank the old titles", recognizing the true path by the "foot's feel", helped by custom and their instinct for the right. But for the common herd, cut away their present faith and instead of rising to the new they will sink to a lower, the faith in the animal wants and desires of man, "the lust and pride of life". Even now their souls seem to need creating anew, and if with all the aid of the Christian faith they fail thus, what will become of them when

this faith is attacked? They will sink in this world's slime, and for their future we can but hope that

“They are grafted, barren twigs,
“ Into the living stock of Christ: may bear
“ One day, till when they lie death-like, not dead.”¹

Yes, my life and the century are ending together, and already the new times mocking at the old would push me forward impatiently as I still block the path. Look at this Caponsacchi, “the first experimentalist in the new order of things”. He guides his life by mere impulse, taking neither inspiration nor rule of life from the Church of which he is a priest, and yet this impulse, as we ourselves allow, has guided him right in the main.

He has danced, in gaiety of heart, i' the main
The right step through the maze we bade him foot.²

(Note carefully the following lines.)

But if his heart had prompted him break loose
And mar the measure? Why, we must submit,
And thank the chance that brought him safe so far.
Will he repeat the prodigy? Perhaps.
Can he teach others how to quit themselves,
Show why this step was right while that were wrong?
How should he? “Ask your hearts as I asked mine,
And get discreetly through the morrice too;
If your hearts misdirect you,—quit the stage,
And make amends,—be there amends to make!”
Such is, for the Augustin that was once,
This Canon Caponsacchi we see now.³

(He who has read *Giuseppe Caponsacchi* will agree here, I think, that Pompilia's description of him was truer than this. What seems unfair to him here is just the suggestion that chance has led him right and might have led him as far wrong, that just as Pompilia led him to the heights, so

¹ Pope, 1897-9.

² Pope, 1916-7.

³ Pope, 1918-29.

some other woman might have led him to the depths. The Pope credits Pompilia with a purity of soul that will not take pollution, and we credit Caponsacchi with a nobility of soul which could rise to the heights but could never be led to the base, the cruel, the mean; and in spite of the escapades of his youth we feel that such a soul as his could never really sink; nay, more than that, we feel that there is no chance about the matter, that he is one of the men who must rise; for he lacks nothing but the opportunity, and this comes not once but many times to all men, and the fault is in ourselves if we do not rise. I may add that Pompilia holds that Caponsacchi was led not by chance but by the divine in him.

“He is ordained to call and I to come,”¹

she says.)

But, continues the Pope, Paolo the Abate chooses quite a different rule of life, believing in just the animal in man, greed, ambition, lust, revenge, and despising the higher. This is Guido’s rule of life also, and through him it influences those four peasants, his accomplices. And what is the first effect of the new order of things? Why, there lie Pietro and Violante,

the old pair

Of the weak head and not so wicked heart,
 With the one Christian mother, wife and girl,
 —Which three gifts seem to make an angel up,—
 The world’s first foot o’ the dance is on their heads!²

But I at least am still Pope, and though I may represent the old order I owe it at least my last act, for, whatever the future may bring, I at least must act out my duty as far as I see it in the present. This also I owe to God,

¹ P. 1814.

² Pope, 1950-4.

who armed me thus

With Paul's sword as with Peter's key. I smite
 With my whole strength once more, ere end my part,
 Ending, so far as man may, this offence.
 And when I raise my arm, who plucks my sleeve?
 Who stops me in the righteous function,—foe
 Or friend? Oh, still as ever, friends are they
 Who, in the interest of outraged truth
 Deprecate such rough handling of a lie!¹

The facts being proved and incontestable, what is the last word I must listen to?

(I stop the paraphrase here as the rest, some 180 lines, seems easy.)

In conclusion the Pope paints the "friends" mentioned above coming forward with the last pleading for Guido's reprieve. Their arguments, however, are much the same as Guido's and are of little interest. They finish with an earnest demand that he should write the reprieve at once, and he, recalling the words Guido had used in his speech, "Who is on the Lord's side?" answers thus:

I will, Sirs: but a voice other than yours
 Quickens my spirit. "*Quis pro Domino?*"
 "Who is upon the Lord's side?" asked the Count.
 I, who write—

"On receipt of this command,
 "Acquaint Count Guido and his fellows four
 "They die to-morrow: could it be to-night,
 "The better, but the work to do, takes time.
 "Set with all diligence a scaffold up,
 "Not in the customary place, by Bridge
 "Saint Angelo, where die the common sort;
 "But since the man is noble, and his peers
 "By predilection haunt the People's Square,
 "There let him be beheaded in the midst,
 "And his companions hanged on either side:
 "So shall the quality see, fear and learn.
 "All which work takes time: till to-morrow, then,
 "Let there be prayer incessant for the five!"

¹ *Pope*, 1957-65.

For the main criminal I have no hope
Except in such a suddenness of fate.
I stood at Naples once, a night so dark
I could have scarce conjectured there was earth
Anywhere, sky or sea or world at all:
But the night's black was burst through by a blaze—
Thunder struck blow on blow, earth groaned and bore,
Through her whole length of mountain visible:
There lay the city thick and plain with spires,
And, like a ghost disshrouded, white the sea.
So may the truth be flashed out by one blow,
And Guido see, one instant, and be saved.
Else I avert my face, nor follow him
Into that sad obscure sequestered state
Where God unmakes but to remake the soul
He else made first in vain; which must not be.
Enough, for I may die this very night
And how should I dare die, this man let live?

Carry this forthwith to the Governor!¹

Then heaves abroad his cares in one good sigh,
Traverses corridor with no arm's help,
And so to sup as a clear conscience should.
The manner of the judgement of the Pope.²

How far this character is true to history the reader can judge from the following extract from Ranke's *History of the Popes*.

“Relatione di Domenico Contarini K. Roma, 1696, 5 Luglio. [Report by Domenico Contarini.] Venetian Archives, 18 leaves.”

Contarini had already been accredited to the French and imperial courts before he was despatched to that of Rome. He was originally sent to Alexander VIII, but this pontiff was even then so ill that he could not be presented to him. His report is consequently devoted to Innocent XII.

¹ *Pope*, 2099-135.

² *R. and B.* 1268-71.

Antonio Pignatelli, born 1615, was descended from the ducal family of Montelione, in the Kingdom of Naples, and was early admitted to the prelacy. He became vice-legate of Urbino, inquisitor of Malta, and governor of Perugia, a career which in itself was certainly not to be despised, but which offered little to satisfy ambition. There were times when Pignatelli was disposed to abandon the ecclesiastical profession altogether; but he finally succeeded in obtaining a nunciature, which he believed to present the most certain path to promotion. He was nuncio to Florence, administered the Polish nunciature during a period of eight years, and then proceeded to that of Germany, which was most commonly followed by the cardinal's hat. But whether, observes Contarini, from the influence of inauspicious stars, or from disinclination towards him in the government of Clement IX, instead of being rewarded, he was recalled and despatched as bishop to Lezze, on the extreme boundaries of Naples. Under these circumstances, he was compelled to exert the whole force of his mind, and the most manly firmness; all the court was, in fact, astonished at the moderation and resigned spirit of which he gave proof. With a supernatural serenity he even returned thanks for that appointment, "because he should now no longer have to endure the heavy burden of the nunciature". Contarini understands that it was Clement IX by whom Pignatelli was banished to that bishopric, and that he was recalled by Clement X; but we are told by the Roman authors that both events took place under Clement X. Be that as it may, and whether Cardinal Altieri desired to atone for injustice committed by himself or by another, he gave Pignatelli the post of "Mæstro di Camera" to his uncle. Innocent XI found him in his office, and confirmed his appointment.

But his fortunes now took a sudden spring. He was made cardinal in the year 1681, immediately afterwards bishop of Faenza, legate of Bologna, and archbishop of Naples. He was thought of in the conclave after the death of Innocent XI; and after that of Alexander VIII, even the French, a thing that no one had expected, declared in his favour, and voted for him,—a Neapolitan. The cause of this was that they required a mild and peaceable man. He was therefore elected, although not until after a tedious conclave of five months, by which all the cardinals were wearied out.

Innocent XII also confirmed Albani and Panciatichi, whom he found in office, as secretary of briefs and datary, although both were indebted for their fortune to his predecessor. The nomination of Spada to be secretary of state was received with universal approbation. This took place by the advice of Altieri. The nephews of Alexander VIII alone were refused confirmation in their offices: the new pontiff "laboured to imitate Pope Innocent XI, by whom he had been promoted to the cardinalate, and whose name he had assumed, seeking to make the practice of that government serve as the model of his own, but departing from the austerity and harshness which had failed to meet approval in the rule of Innocent XI." We perceive that he endeavoured to surpass his model by adding clemency to the good qualities he desired to imitate. He gave audience most readily, and owed much of his reputation to the facility of access afforded to the poor by his public audiences; and although these did not, as the applicants had hoped, insure the speedy termination of their difficulties, they yet served to restrain the violent proceedings of the superior classes. "All confessed that this public audience was a powerful check on the ministers and judges; for the means of approaching the ear of the prince were thus afforded to all, and made it easy to disclose to him things which had previously been concealed from the popes, either by the authority or the craft of those who surrounded them."

An unfortunate accident suspended the efforts of Innocent XII for a certain time, but he soon resumed the activity of his habits.

The French affair was arranged, the most important reforms were begun. The bull respecting nepotism appeared, and in this it was enacted that the benefices and Church revenues, henceforth to be conferred on a kinsman of the pope, should never exceed 12,000 scudi per annum. Innocent XII also abolished the sale of appointments so important as were those of the clerks of the chamber ("chierici di camera"), and paid back the price advanced for them,—1,016,070 scudi. "He thus deprived gold of its power, and made it once more possible for virtue to attain to the highest places." Many other reforms were already looked for. "The pope," says Contarini, "has nothing in his thoughts but God, the poor, and the reform of abuses. He lives in the most abstemious retirement, devoting every

hour to his duties, without consideration for his health. He is most blameless in his habits, and most conscientious; he is also extremely disinterested, nor does he seek to enrich his kindred; he is full of love to the poor, and is endowed with all the great qualities that could be desired for a head of the Church. Could he only act for himself on all occasions, —he would be one of the first of popes.”

But these modes of proceeding were not agreeable to all. Contarini laments that Innocent had no nephews, who might have felt a personal interest in the glory of their uncle, and that too much power was left in the hands of the ministers. “Those great and resplendent virtues were seen to be obscured by the craft of the ministers, who were but too well practised in the arts of the court.” They are accused of having taken measures for giving a different direction to the zeal of Innocent XII by turning his attention exclusively on the support and relief of the poor. The hospital of the Lateran was proposed. This soon engrossed all the thoughts of the pope. “Questo chiodo fermò l’ardente volontà del papa di riformare.” (That nail effectually stopped the pope’s eager progress in reform.)

The author is persuaded that this pontiff had saved and laid by nearly two million scudi. He is deeply impressed by the purity of his intentions, and calls him a man of the most irreproachable—nay, the most faultless character.

X

GUIDO

We come now to the book *Guido*, which ranks with *Giuseppe Caponsacchi*, *Pompilia*, and *The Pope* as one of the greatest things Browning has written.

In the introductory book we have a picture of Guido in his cell with the two churchmen who watch through the night with him.

How Guido, to another purpose quite,
Speaks and despairs, the last night of his life,
In that New Prison by Castle Angelo
At the bridge foot: the same man, another voice.
On a stone bench in a close fetid cell,
Where the hot vapour of an agony,
Struck into drops on the cold wall, runs down—
Horrible worms made out of sweat and tears—
There crouch, well nigh to the knees in dungeon-straw,
Lit by the sole lamp suffered for their sake,
Two awe-struck figures, this a Cardinal,
That an Abate, both of old styled friends
O' the thing part man part monster in the midst,
So changed is Franceschini's gentle blood.
The tiger-cat screams now, that whined before,
That pried and tried and trod so gingerly,
Till in its silkeness the trap-teeth joined;
Then you know how the bristling fury foams.
They listen, this wrapped in his folds of red,
While his feet fumble for the filth below;
The other, as beseems a stouter heart,
Working his best with beads and cross to ban
The enemy that comes in like a flood.¹

Guido alone of all the actors speaks twice. His first

¹ *R. and B.* 1282-1304.

speech before his judges is called *Count Guido Franceschini*, because, as one critic points out, he is still the astute polished Italian nobleman, still hides to the best of his ability his real nature behind the cloak of conventionality which he feels it convenient to wear.

While life was graspable and gainable,
And bird-like buzzed her wings round Guido's brow,
Not much truth stiffened out the web of words
He wove to catch her.¹

This speech, skilful as it is, cannot stand beside the second in which Browning finds the kind of subject which suits him best. In an introductory note affixed to *Sordello* in 1863 he says: "My stress lay on the incidents in the development of a soul: little else is worth study. I at least always thought so." When he wrote this he was already pondering over the story of *The Ring and the Book*. Browning's interest, then, is centred in the world of character. But the subject that suits him best is not the gradual development of a soul, but the crisis in its process of development. He takes a character, great in some way, at the supreme moment of its existence and makes it reveal itself to us in its strength and weakness. Hence his greatest poems all take the form of dramatic monologue. There is no prologue, no introduction. The curtain is abruptly torn aside. A flash of dazzling light reveals the mind of the actor and we see Caponsacchi in the agony of his trial, now on the rack of despair, now rising above all human frailty till we gaze on him as something divine, a man purified by the love of the good, the true, the beautiful, and these not as abstract qualities but as realized in the woman he loves; Pompilia is presented to us at the moment when she has attained her full stature, at the moment when, all sorrow and suffering past, she is able for the first time to review and pronounce

¹ *R. and B.* 1275-8.

upon her life; the Pope who has grown old in well-doing, who has never shirked the struggle, we see brooding over the trial, shuddering at the depths of wickedness, glorying in the nobility and purity it has revealed, facing his doubts like a man and rising above them to the act which condemns Guido; while Guido we see on the last night of his life; he knows himself but had hoped to dupe the world, and now his hope is gone; and so in despair, but at times with a certain joy in the relief, he casts aside the weary burden of conventionality he has borne so long as a cloak, and finds the only happiness life has left him, the happiness of full and free self-expression.

There, let my sheepskin-garb, a curse on 't, go—
Leave my teeth free if I must show my shag! ¹

In the other books we have seen Guido's universe criticized from a higher and nobler universe, if I may put it so; more than this, in the book *Count Guido Franceschini*, Guido attempts to show that he belongs to this higher and nobler universe, and regarded thus he seems mean and base, avaricious and cruel, cowardly and perhaps even weak. But all this criticism is external. If we are to judge him at all we must first understand him, and understanding comes only through sympathy.

To form a just estimate of a man we must not merely look at the external product, his act in the world, but by an exercise of sympathy must make ourselves, for the time being, one with him, that we may see his act from within, see life as he saw it and understand what he aimed at doing; for it is true not only in Shakespeare but in life that "our thoughts are ours, their ends none of our own". Guido so far has been judged only by the ends, so far the real man has never spoken. But now in his last great speech he turns upon the world and criticizes it from his own point

¹ G. 443-4.

of view, shows us life as he sees it, and in so doing shows us his own universe from within, thus revealing to us the real mind of the man. Here we at once become aware that his is by no means a weak character; the passions in him are too keen and strong, too full of exuberant life. But more than this, we see at once that he has an ideal in life and that he has striven to realize it with persistence and courage in the face of defeat. Those who have read Browning's *Statue and the Bust* will remember that he there condemns the guilty pair for not carrying out their ideal, evil as it was.

Let a man contend to the uttermost
For his life's set prize, be it what it will.

No one who has read *The Ring and the Book* carefully will deny that Guido at least contended to the uttermost for his life's set prize. What then was his ideal in life, the set prize he strove to attain?

Perhaps the first thing we notice in him is the entire absence of love. He stands absolutely alone, loving his own life, hating anyone who interferes in any way with the realization of his desires. His ideas of the duties of a parent show this clearer than anything else.

Ay, but the babe. . . . I had forgot my son,
My heir! Now for a burst of gratitude!
There 's some appropriate service to intone,
Some *gaudeamus* and thanksgiving-psalm!
Old, I renew my youth in him, and poor
Possess a treasure,—is not that the phrase?
Only I must wait patient twenty years—
Nourishing all the while, as father ought,
The excrescence with my daily blood of life.
Does it respond to hope, such sacrifice,—
Grows the wen plump while I myself grow lean? ¹

Even then he asks what is the gain to him, how is this

¹ G. 1847-57.

sacrifice to help him towards attaining *his* ideal? But suppose his son, after he has made this sacrifice for him, should prove to be but

the medium measure of a man,
The usual compromise 'twixt fool and sage,¹

Then, this has been a costly piece of work,
My life exchanged for his!—why he, not I,
Enjoy the world, if no more grace accrue? ²

It is evident that he cannot even conceive self-sacrificing love, cannot conceive that the father finds a joy in thus sacrificing himself for his child that is in itself a complete reward.

No, nothing repays youth expended so—³

Therefore no sort of use for son have I—
Sick, not of life's feast but of steps to climb
To the house where life prepares her feast,—of means
To the end.⁴

He paints a picture, it is true, of the woman he could love, a picture which corroborates what I have said above. A woman who makes him her God, and devotes herself as a means to his attaining his ideal, her he might have loved.

O those Olimpias bold, those Biancas brave,
That brought a husband power worth Ormuz' wealth!
Cried "Thou being mine, why, what but thine am I?
"Be thou to me law, right, wrong, heaven and hell!
"Let us blend souls, blent, thou in me, to bid
"Two bodies work one pleasure! What are these
"Called king, priest, father, mother, stranger, friend?
"They fret thee or they frustrate? Give the word—
"Be certain they shall frustrate nothing more!
"And who is this young florid foolishness
"That holds thy fortune in his pigmy clutch,

¹ G. 1879-80.

² G. 1872-4.

³ G. 1896.

⁴ G. 1902-5.

"—Being a prince and potency, forsooth!—
 "He hesitates to let the trifle go?
 "Let me but seal up eye, sing ear to sleep
 "Sounder than Samson,—pounce thou on the prize
 "Shall slip from off my breast, and down couch-side,
 "And on to floor, and far as my lord's feet—
 "Where he stands in the shadow with the knife,
 "Waiting to see what Delilah dares do!
 "Is the youth fair? What is a man to me
 "Who am thy call-bird? Twist his neck—my dupe's,—
 "Then take the breast shall turn a breast indeed!"¹

But here again there is no suggestion that he is to sacrifice himself in any way for her. The satisfaction of his desires is to be her ideal, and so they would be one in spirit. He is thus an absolute egoist, and declares it in the words,

I knew that just myself concerned myself.²

Morality also seems absent in his universe. The more we examine his view of the world the more we feel that Guido is not so much immoral as simply non-moral, that in this respect he is not a man but an animal. If we take his description of his treatment of Pompilia, for instance, we feel that, cruel as it is to us, it does not seem so to him. On the contrary he declares himself aggrieved and expects us to sympathize with him.

Before, the parents' presence lent her life:
 She could play off her sex's armoury,
 Entreat, reproach, be female to my male,
 Try all the shrieking doubles of the hare,
 Go clamour to the Commissary, bid
 The Archbishop hold my hands and stop my tongue,
 And yield fair sport so: but the tactics change,
 The hare stands stock-still to enrage the hound!
 Since that day when she learned she was no child
 Of those she thought her parents,—that their trick
 Had tricked me whom she thought sole trickster late,—

¹ G. 2184-205.

² G. 164.

Why, I suppose she said within herself
 "Then, no more struggle for my parents' sake!
 "And, for my own sake, why needs struggle be?"
 But is there no third party to the pact?
 What of her husband's relish or dislike
 For this new game of giving up the game,
 This worst offence of not offending more?
 I'll not believe but instinct wrought in this,
 Set her on to conceive and execute
 The preferable plague: how sure they probe—
 These jades, the sensitivest soft of man! ¹

If the cat could describe to us its method of dealing with the living mouse it catches, it might seem cruel to us, but we would see that the cat did not so regard it. In addition, if the mouse instead of trying to escape lay passive in its claws, awaiting death and so not yielding fair sport, would not the cat declare itself aggrieved? This seems exactly Guido's case. This absence of morality shows itself also in a profound disbelief in the existence of faith in the world. Thus he says:

Entire faith, or else complete unbelief!
 Aught between has my loathing and contempt,
 Mine, and God's also, doubtless; ²

that is, having himself realized one of these ideals, complete unbelief, he is unable to understand that the whole struggle of the world is but its attempt to rise from his ideal to the other, "entire faith", and that the realization of this other is impossible for men. As the Pope has shown, the struggle is the means by which man's moral nature advances, and the only means by which it can do so. But entire faith would mean an end to this struggle and so to all advance—that is, it would mean that man's moral nature had attained perfection. Guido looks round on the world

¹ G. 1327-48.

² G. 730-2.

with the eye of an unbeliever and finds abundant evidence of the failure of faith, e.g.

What does the father when his son lies dead,
The merchant when his money-bags take wing,
The politician whom a rival ousts?

.
. this rends his hair
Because his child is taken to God's breast,
That gnashes teeth and raves at loss of trash
Which rust corrupts and thieves break through and steal,
And this, enabled to inherit earth
Through meekness, curses till your blood runs cold!
Down they all drop to my low level, rest
Heart upon dungy earth that 's warm and soft.¹

So he concludes that just as he found the pretence of faith a convenient cloak, it is but the same for all others.

I say, if ever was such faith at all
Born in the world, by your community
Suffered to live its little tick of time,
'T is dead of age, now, ludicrously dead.²

.
Now, you 'll own, at this present, when I speak,
. there 's no man
Woman or child in Rome, faith's fountain head,
But might, if each were minded, realize
Conversely unbelief, faith's opposite—
Set it to work on life unflinchingly,
Yet give no symptom of an outward change:
Why should things change because men disbelieve? ³

.
Look in your own heart, if your soul have eyes!
You shall see reason why, though faith were fled,
Unbelief still might work the wires and move
Man, the machine, to play a faithful part.⁴

.
Do you suppose I am at loss at all
Why you crook, why you cringe, why fast or feast?

¹ G. 745-58.

² G. 558-61.

³ G. 595-602.

⁴ G. 610-3.

Praise, blame, sit, stand, lie or go!—all of it,
In each of you, purest unbelief may prompt,
And wit explain to who has eyes to see.¹

He does not see that unless men believe there would be nothing to be gained by pretending to believe, that pretence gains only in so far as it deceives, and how could it deceive if men did not take the pretence for the real,—that is, if they did not believe in the reality of the world they see through faith? But to Guido the failure of faith is a proof that all faith is unreal.

I call such difference 'twixt act and act,
Sheer lunacy unless your truth on lip
Be recognized a lie in heart of you!²

Later he talks of the mob

That acts on the frank faithless principle,
Born-baptized-and-bred Christian-atheists, each
With just as much a right to judge as you.³

I give one last quotation to show his belief in pretence, as it illustrates how far he was from conceiving the nature of real love.

You have some fifty servants, Cardinal,—
Which of them loves you? Which subordinate
But makes parade of such officiousness
That,—if there 's no love prompts it,—love, the sham,
Does twice the service done by love, the true?⁴

.

God

Laid down the law: gave man the brawny arm
And ball of fist—woman the beardless cheek
And proper place to suffer in the side:
Since it is he can strike, let her obey!
Can she feel no love? Let her show the more,
Sham the worse, damn herself praiseworthy!⁵

.

¹ G. 617-21. ² G. 669-71. ³ G. 708-10. ⁴ G. 1386-90. ⁵ G. 1403-9.

Here 's my slave,
 Whose body and soul depend upon my nod,
 Can't falter out the first note in the scale
 For her life! Why blame me if I take the life?
 All women cannot give men love, forsooth!
 No, nor all pullets lay the henwife eggs—
 Whereat she bids them remedy the fault,
 Brood on a chalk-ball: soon the nest is stocked—
 Otherwise, to the plucking and the spit!
 'This wife of mine was of another mood—
 Would not begin the lie that ends with truth,
 Nor feign the love that brings real love about:
 Wherefore I judged, sentenced and punished her.¹

But, however wanting in love and morality Guido's character may seem, his intellect at least is keen and strong, and within its own limits his judgment is wonderfully accurate. One example may suffice here. Caponsacchi, as we have seen, advises his judges not to put Guido to death but to send him back to the world "that knows him now", and then proceeds to show how the world would turn from him in horror. Guido sees this just as clearly though from a different point of view. The two pictures, similar as they are in some ways, show so clearly the different characters of the speakers that I give Caponsacchi's again that it may be compared with Guido's. Caponsacchi puts it thus:

Let us go away—leave Guido all alone
 Back on the world again that knows him now!
 I think he will be found (indulge so far!)
 Not to die so much as slide out of life,
 Pushed by the general horror and common hate
 Low, lower,—left o' the very ledge of things,
 I seem to see him catch convulsively
 One by one at all honest forms of life,
 At reason, order, decency and use—
 To cramp him and get foothold by at least;
 And still they disengage them from his clutch.
 "What, you are he, then, had Pompilia once

¹ G. 1420-32.

"And so forewent her? Take not up with us!"
 And thus I see him slowly and surely edged
 Off all the table-land whence life upsprings
 Aspiring to be immortality.¹

Guido's picture is entirely wanting in the moral earnestness of this, and yet he seems to be getting at the same truth, though from a lower standpoint.

Why is it that I make such suit to live?
 The popular sympathy that 's round me now
 Would break like bubble that o'er-domes a fly:
 Solid enough while he lies quiet there,
 But let him want the air and ply the wing,
 Why, it breaks and bespatters him, what else?
 Cardinal, if the Pope had pardoned me,
 And I walked out of prison through the crowd,
 It would not be your arm I should dare press!
 Then, if I got safe to my place again,
 How sad and sapless were the years to come!
 I go my old ways and find things grown grey;
 You priests leer at me, old friends look askance,
 The mob 's in love, I 'll wager, to a man,
 With my poor young good beauteous murdered wife.²

My brothers quietly would edge me out
 Of use and management of things called mine;
 Do I command? "You stretched command before!"
 Show anger? "Anger little helped you once!"
 Advise? "How managed you affairs of old?"
 My very mother, all the while they gird,
 Turns eye up, gives confirmatory groan;
 For unsuccess, explain it how you will,
 Disqualifies you, makes you doubt yourself,
 —Much more, is found decisive by your friends.³

Love and faith, then—he hears of them in the world,
 finds them a convenient cloak, considers they are but the
 same for everyone else, and, where they prove to be more

¹ G.C. 1908-23.
 (D 435)

² G. 1812-26.

³ G. 1834-43.
 14

than this, as in Pompilia, they merely puzzle him and rouse his hate and loathing, hate because they interfere with all he wishes to accomplish, and loathing because they come as a direct contradiction of his ideal, and propose to him an ideal which would demand the sacrifice of all he holds sweet in life. In such a soul as his there is no room for repentance, no possibility of it, for there is no consciousness of evil.

What else am I to cry out in my rage,
Unable to repent one particle
O' the past?¹

You both persist to call that act a crime,
Which sense would call . . . yes, I maintain it, Sirs, . . .
A blunder!²

My fault . . . as God's my judge,
I see not where my fault lies, that's the truth!³

Cardinal,
You know I am wronged!—wronged, say, and wronged,
maintain.⁴

He knows well that there is a world outside his own, but he is like the man born blind who knows of the world of light, because he hears others speak of it, but who never can conceive it. Thus note how confident he is, that if there is a future world, he will read its laws aright, he who has so entirely failed to read the laws of this world.

Is there a new rule in another world?
Be sure I shall resign myself: as here
I recognized no law I could not see,
There, what I see, I shall acknowledge too:
On earth I never took the Pope for God,
In heaven I shall scarce take God for the Pope.⁵

If Guido at times seems weak it is because he is brought

¹ G. 944-6.

² G. 952-4.

³ G. 1449-50.

⁴ G. 2233-4.

⁵ G. 2387-92.

into direct opposition with this higher and more powerful universe. Thus in the meeting at Castelnovo when he quails before the eye of Caponsacchi, it is not the mere man Caponsacchi he fears, but the divine strength in him at the moment. Again he breaks down utterly at the approach of death. But what animal, however brave, will not cower and quail before death, if resistance is impossible. It is the certainty of death, the impossibility of escape, the uselessness of resistance of any kind, that crushes the animal Guido. In his own world, however, he is strong, nay more, he feels the glory and exultation of life, sees the beauty of the material world, and, in his passion for the joy of life, rises at times to poetry that seems quite out of place in the Guido we have known from the other books only. In describing how one warm evening in May he saw the guillotine for the first time, he breaks out into a passage that seems tingling with joy in the beauty of nature and life, though the minute after the animal-horror of death reasserts itself.

There 's no such lovely month in Rome as May—
May's crescent is no half-moon of red plank,
And came now tilting o'er the wave i' the west,
One greenish-golden sea, right 'twixt those bars
Of the engine—I began acquaintance with,
Understood, hated, hurried from before,
To have it out of sight and cleanse my soul!¹

Again later he talks of human beings in their relation to death as waves moving towards the rocks, and here we feel how keenly even he can appreciate the great tranquil peace of nature and the joy of the free life.

Go to! the smoothest safest of you all,
Most perfect and compact wave in my train,
Spite of the blue tranquillity above,
Spite of the breadth before of lapsing peace

¹ G. 250-6.

Where broods the halcyon and the fish leaps free,
Will presently begin to feel the prick
At lazy heart, the push at torpid brain.¹

He shows us too, in discussing the failure of his plot, that he understands art's failure at the moment of success, the ideal which can never be quite realized.

Why fell not things out so nor otherwise?
Ask that particular devil whose task it is
To trip the all-but-at perfection,—slur
The line of the painter just where paint leaves off
And life begins,—put ice into the ode
O' the poet while he cries "Next stanza—fire!"
Inscribe all human effort with one word,
Artistry's haunting curse, the Incomplete.²

More even than this he appreciates the effect of death on life and expresses it in a passage almost worthy of the Pope.

You never know what life means till you die:
Even throughout life, 't is death that makes life live,
Gives it whatever the significance.
For see, on your own ground and argument,
Suppose life had no death to fear, how find
A possibility of nobleness
In man, prevented daring any more?
What 's love, what 's faith without a worse to dread?
Lack-lustre jewelry! but faith and love
With death behind them bidding do or die—
Put such a foil at back, the sparkle 's born!³

He is, however, none the less a human beast of prey, and his description of how laws rose among men shows this well. He gives us a picture of society as a world of mutually repelling atoms, in which pleasure, like so much gold, if gained by one is lost by another. This is natural to him. It is the material view he adopts all through. He is quite blind to the fact that in giving pleasure we gain most, that

¹ G. 2358-64.

² G. 1554-61.

³ G. 2375-85.

joy shared may divide into parts each greater than the original whole. In the passage which follows he speaks of murdering his foe with the sort of joy we expect in the beast of prey in making his kill, and we do not feel that he is cruel nor yet that it is the cruelty he enjoys. He is not a fiend revelling in the suffering he inflicts like Count Cenci, but an animal whose nature it is to kill its prey and find satisfaction in so doing. He holds that murder is one of the things that men call wicked because they are too sweet, since the man who gets them gets more than his share of the joy of life, while what we call the punishment of his evil is just the world wreaking its envy on him.

I say that, long ago, when things began,
All the world made agreement, such and such
Were pleasure-giving profit-bearing acts,
But henceforth extra-legal, nor to be:
You must not kill the man whose death would please
And profit you, unless his life stop yours
Plainly, and need so be put aside:
Get the thing by a public course, by law,
Only no private bloodshed as of old!
All of us, for the good of every one,
Renounced such licence and conformed to law:
Who breaks law, breaks pact therefore, helps himself
To pleasure and profit over and above the due,
And must pay forfeit,—pain beyond his share:
For, pleasure being the sole good in the world,
Anyone's pleasure turns to someone's pain,
So, law must watch for everyone,—say we,
Who call things wicked that give too much joy,
And nickname mere reprisal, envy makes,
Punishment: quite right! thus the world goes round.¹

We may now answer the question with which we set out, —what does Guido consider “his life's set prize”? what is the “actual sweet” in life for him? Perhaps the easiest

¹ G. 515-34.

way to answer will be to take the picture he paints of the future world. He dismisses scornfully the idea of hell and proceeds at once to that of transmigration; thus,

Change that Pompilia to a puny stream
Fit to reflect the daisies on its bank!
Let me turn wolf, be whole, and sate, for once,—
Wallow in what is now a wolfishness
Coerced too much by the humanity
That 's half of me as well! Grow out of man,
Glut the wolf-nature,—what remains but grow
Into the man again, be man indeed
And all man? ¹

In this way is

The honest instinct, pent and crossed through life,
Let surge by death into a visible flow
Of rapture. ²

Beware me in what other world may be!—
Pompilia, who have brought me to this pass!
All I know here, will I say there, and go
Beyond the saying with the deed. Some use
There cannot but be for a mood like mine,
Implacable, persistent in revenge. ³

His ideal, then, is to glut the animal in him, to have his gorge of what he thinks the good things of this world. His taste in art confirms this:

Some prefer the pure design:
Give me my gorge of colour, glut of gold
In a glory round the Virgin made for me!
Titian's the man, not Monk Angelico
Who traces you some timid chalky ghost
That turns the church into a charnel; ay,
Just such a pencil might depict my wife! ⁴

Faith in any world beyond he rejects because of its un-

¹ G. 2054-62.

² G. 2064-6.

³ G. 2102-7.

⁴ G. 2118-24.

certainly. It can but promise while he demands that it should pay down. His faith, he tells us frankly, is entirely in this world, and he concludes that if he has been wrong he has at least had his life, while if he is right, "I've got the single good there was to gain". Similarly he rejects repentance, because it can give him nothing in this life. If it would save his life he would repent, that is he would pretend to do so, but if not, what is to be gained by it?

Repent? What good shall follow? If I pass
Twelve hours repenting, will that fact hold fast
The thirteenth at the horrid dozen's end?
If I fall forthwith at your feet, gnash, tear,
Foam, rave, to give your story the due grace,
Will that assist the engine half-way back
Into its hiding-house? ¹

In the following passage it will be noted that he describes the murder he has committed as "browsing on the best". We see in it also, however, the real strength of the man, his complete faith in his ideal in life, and distrust in everything but the material. He had tried, he says, like an obedient beast of burden, to live the life prescribed by the Church, to grind her corn and relish her chaff.

I tried chaff, found I famished on such fare,
So made this mad rush at the mill-house-door,
Buried my head up to the ears in dew,
Browsed on the best: for which you brain me, Sirs!
Be it so. I conceived of life that way,
And still declare—life, without absolute use
Of the actual sweet therein, is death, not life.
Give me,—pay down,—not promise, which is air,—
Something that 's out of life and better still,
Make sure reward, make certain punishment,
Entice me, scare me,—I 'll forgo this life;
Otherwise, no!—the less that words, mere wind,
Would cheat me of some minutes while they plague,
Baulk fulness of revenge here. ²

¹ G. 445-51.

² G. 1482-95.

However false his view of life may be, his entire faith in it makes him strong, and at times he seems to tower above the two churchmen before him.

Me, the immeasurably marked, by God,
Master of the whole world of such as you.¹

He is, indeed, master of all such so long as they are inhabitants of his world. Their weakness lies in their belonging to two different universes, but their weakness is also their strength. Guido is a real prince of evil, not, like Iago, a mystery of evil. When we read his last great speech he seems to tower up in the strength and truth of his nature, a fit antagonist even for Caponsacchi, Pompilia, and the Pope. At no point before in the story has the reader been in sympathy with him. But truth is truth, and though we have no sympathy whatsoever for his theory of life, a theory that suits not the brute but the human brute, somehow Guido gets home to us for the first time. We feel that at last we are getting at what is solid in him, that at last he is speaking from his heart, and, however we shudder over it, we feel that this too is human, that this too is in us, and there seems a certain pathos in the figure of the man who has chosen this as representing the whole truth of life, and whose life has proved so clearly that the strife of the world is just its effort to rise above this. He has been foiled at every turn, and now, baffled and beaten, unable to see his own mistake, blind to the fact that he represents just that in life which leads to death, he turns in his rage and despair on the world which has rejected him. There is nothing noble in him, nothing beautiful, nothing that can rouse our admiration. But once we see the real man Guido, so terrible in his strength, so helpless in his blindness, we cannot but feel a certain pathos in his despairing fear of

¹ G. 1505-6.

death, however much he has merited it, in his attempts to banish the thought of it from his mind and rise above it, in his desire to die like the wolf, at strife with the whole world but fighting to the last, and his final cry of despair, cowardly as it may seem, fills us with shuddering pity.

As we have seen, Guido passes the long night in giving free vent to what has been so long cooped up within his soul. He passes in review his own life and the world as he knows it, pointing out how the world has finally and entirely rejected him, and declares that this gives him strength.

I do get strength from being thrust to wall,
Successively wrenched from pillar and from post
By this tenacious hate of fortune, hate
Of all things in, under, and above earth.
Warfare, begun this mean unmanly mode,
Does best to end so,—gives earth spectacle
Of a brave fighter who succumbs to odds
That turn defeat to victory. Stab, I fold
My mantle round me! Rome approves my act:
Applauds the blow which costs me life but keeps
My honour spotless.¹

The momentary strength enables him to face, but for the moment only, the thought of death, and he prophesies how he will stand the ordeal.

I shall not presently, when the knock comes,
Cling to this bench nor claw the hangman's face,
No, trust me! I conceive worse lots than mine.
Whether it be, the old contagious fit
And plague o' the prison have surprised me too,
The appropriate drunkenness of the death-hour
Crept on my sense, kind work o' the wine and myrrh,—
I know not,—I begin to taste my strength,
Careless, gay even.²

How false this is we shall soon see. His speech

¹ G. 1796-1806.

² G. 2323-31.

concludes with one last outburst of the animal in him.

Till when,
 All that was, is; and must forever be.
 Nor is it in me to unhate my hates,—
 I use up my last strength to strike once more
 Old Pietro in the wine-house-gossip-face,
 To trample underfoot the whine and wile
 Of beast Violante,—and I grow one gorge
 To loathingly reject Pompilia's pale
 Poison my hasty hunger took for food.
 A strong tree wants no wreaths about its trunk,
 No cloying cups, no sickly sweet of scent,
 But sustenance at root, a bucketful.
 How else lived that Athenian who died so,
 Drinking hot bull's blood, fit for men like me?
 I lived and died a man, and take man's chance,
 Honest and bold: right will be done to such.¹

But meanwhile the preparations for the execution have been completed, and all is now ready for the final procession to the scaffold.

For at the prison-gate, just a few steps
 Outside, already, in the doubtful dawn,
 Thither, from this side and from that, slow sweep
 And settle down in silence solidly,
 Crow-wise, the frightful Brotherhood of Death.
 Black-hatted and black-hooded huddle they,
 Black rosaries a-dangling from each waist;
 So take they their grim station at the door,
 Torches lit, skull-and-cross-bones-banner spread,
 And that gigantic Christ with open arms,
 Grounded.²

And now the door is opened and some descend the stair
 to the cell to take Guido, while the rest

Break forth, intone the lamentable psalm,
 "Out of the deeps, Lord, have I cried to thee!"³

¹ G. 2398-2413.

² R. and B. 1307-17.

³ R. and B. 1318-9.

This brings home to Guido the fact that his hour has come, and at once the animal-dread of death reasserts itself, and completely overpowers him.

Who are these you have let descend my stair?
Ha, their accursed psalm! Lights at the sill!
Is it "Open" they dare bid you? Treachery!
Sirs, have I spoken one word all this while
Out of the world of words I had to say?
Not one word! All was folly—I laughed and mocked!
Sirs, my first true word, all truth and no lie,
Is—save me notwithstanding! Life is all!
I was just stark mad,—let the madman live
Pressed by as many chains as you please pile!
Don't open! Hold me from them! I am yours,
I am the Granduke's—no, I am the Pope's!
Abate,—Cardinal,—Christ,—Maria,—God, . .
Pompilia, will you let them murder me? ¹

Thus even to the last Guido's faith is in what he has known in this world. His last appeal for help is to the woman he has tortured and murdered. He knows that she at least would help him if she could, that

There was no touch in her of hate:
And it would prove her hell, if I reached mine!
To know I suffered, would still sadden her,
Do what the angels might to make amends! ²

His faith in her alone is sure. She is more to him at this moment than God himself. Does not this one line contain perhaps the most wonderful picture in the whole poem, the veritable triumph of the good?

¹ G. 2414-27.

² G. 2089-92.

XI

CONCLUSION

Here our story ends, and we have now but to gather up the few scattered facts from the last book, *The Book and the Ring*. In it we have a description of the procession to the scaffold and the execution of Guido. We have also a statement of the belief among the people as to how he spent his last night. As a sample of the truth of popular report this is well worth reading. We are told regarding the two churchmen who spent the night with him that

“ They both report their efforts to dispose
“ The unhappy nobleman for ending well,
“ Despite the natural sense of injury,
“ Were crowned at last with a complete success.
“ And when the Company of Death arrived

“ The Count was led down, hoisted up on car,
“ Last of the five, as heinous, you know:

“ His intrepidity, nay, nonchalance,
“ As up he stood and down he sat himself,
“ Struck admiration into those who saw.”¹

The procession wound its slow way through the town to the People's Square.

“ Now did a car run over, kill a man,
“ Just opposite a pork-shop numbered Twelve.”²

“ Now did a beggar by Saint Agnes, lame
“ From his youth up, recover use of leg,

¹ *B. and R.* 125-37.

² *B. and R.* 154-5.

"Through prayer of Guido as he glanced that way:
 "So that the crowd near crammed his hat with coin."¹

.
 "To mount the scaffold-steps, Guido was last
 "Here also, as atrociouslest in crime.
 "We hardly noticed how the peasants died,
 "They dangled somehow soon to right and left,
 "And we remained all ears and eyes, could give
 "Ourselves to Guido undividedly,
 "As he harangued the multitude beneath.
 "He begged forgiveness on the part of God,
 "And fair construction of his act from men,
 "Whose suffrage he entreated for his soul,
 "Suggesting that we should forthwith repeat
 "A *Pater* and an *Ave*, with the hymn
 "*Salve Regina Cæli*, for his sake.
 "Which said, he turned to the confessor, crossed
 "And reconciled himself, with decency."²

.
 "Then rose up, as brisk
 "Knelt down again, bent head, adapted neck,
 "And, with the name of Jesus on his lips,
 "Received the fatal blow.

"The headsman showed
 "The head to the populace. Must I avouch
 "We strangers own to disappointment here?
 "Report pronounced him fully six feet high,
 "Youngish, considering his fifty years,
 "And, if not handsome, dignified at least.
 "Indeed, it was no face to please a wife!"³

This is capped by a quotation from a letter by the Fisc, Pompilia's lawyer. "This Guido

"Finished, as you expect, a penitent,
 "Fully confessed his crime, and made amends,
 "And, edifying Rome last Saturday,
 "Died like a saint, poor devil!"⁴

Thus did the fear of death drive Guido from the truth,

¹ B. and R. 159-62.

² B. and R. 167-81.

³ B. and R. 186-96.

⁴ B. and R. 417-20.

lead him back to the world of pretence, the pretence of religion and repentance.

The Pope refers in his soliloquy to the fact that the Monastery of Convertites, who had at first testified to the purity of Pompilia, had, on discovering that she was wealthy, laid claim to all her wealth. This they had done at the suggestion of the Fisc, the lawyer who was supposed to defend her. They based their claim on the fact that the trial had proved Pompilia to be of dishonest life, and by law they were the legal heirs of all such women as received help from them. Six months later, however, the Pope gave decision against them.

The Instrument

Is plain before me, print that ends my Book
 With the definitive verdict of the Court,
 Dated September, six months afterward,
 (Such trouble and so long the old Pope gavel)
 " In restitution of the perfect fame
 " Of dead Pompilia, *quondam* Guido's wife,
 " And warrant to her representative
 " Domenico Tighetti, barred hereby,
 " While doing duty in his guardianship,
 " From all molesting, all disquietude,
 " Each perturbation and vexation brought
 " Or threatened to be brought against the heir
 " By the Most Venerable Convent called
 " Saint Mary Magdalen o' the Convertites
 " I' the Corso."¹

Regarding the Pope we hear:

Next year but one, completing his nine years
 Of rule in Rome, died Innocent my Pope
 —By some account, on his accession-day.²

It will be remembered that in his soliloquy the Pope suggested that what the world of his time needed was that

¹ B. and R. 752-67.

² B. and R. 772-4.

doubt should be reintroduced into the world, that it might call faith to life again. On this subject Browning adds:

If he thought doubt would do the next age good,
 'T is pity he died unapprised what birth
 His reign may boast of, be remembered by—
 Terrible Pope, too, of a kind,—Voltaire.¹

As for Pompilia's child Gaetano, Browning sought in vain for any record of him, nor does he give us any further information regarding Caponsacchi. The last thing we hear of is:

A record, in the annals of the town—
 That Porzia, sister of our Guido, moved
 The priors of Arezzo and their head
 Its Gonfalonier to give loyally
 A public attestation of the right
 O' the Franceschini to all reverence.²

This was done apparently to blot out the scandal of the murder and the execution. The request was granted. Here is the attestation:

" Since antique time whereof the memory
 " Holds the beginning, to this present hour,
 " The Franceschini ever shone, and shine
 " Still i' the primary rank, supreme amid
 " The lustres of Arezzo, proud to own
 " In this great family, the flag-bearer,
 " Guide of her steps and guardian against foe,—
 " As in the first beginning, so to-day!"³

I close the story with the words in which Browning gives the moral of the tale.

So British Public, who may like me yet,
 (Marry and amen!) learn one lesson hence
 Of many which whatever lives should teach:
 This lesson, that our human speech is naught,

¹ *B. and R.* 775-8.

² *B. and R.* 784-9.

³ *B. and R.* 800-7.

Our human testimony false, our fame
And human estimation words and wind.¹

And now, as my last word on this subject, let me give not so much the lesson as the ideal of *The Ring and the Book*:

But all, the world's coarse thumb
And finger failed to plumb,

All I could never be,
All men ignored in me,
his I was worth to God.

What do we learn from Guido and the Pope, from Caponsacchi and Pompilia, but simply that there is nothing in this world so strong as truth, nothing so beautiful as pure unselfishness, nothing so heroic as simple sincerity, nothing so divine as human love? The strength of Guido lies in his truth, and in it he towers above all weaker though less evil characters. It is his sincerity that makes the Pope a heroic figure, while in their devotion to the good and true, in the entire forgetfulness of self which is realized in their love, Caponsacchi and Pompilia are almost ideal. But these all lie too deep for the world's coarse thumb and finger. In its eyes Guido "died like a saint, poor devil".

We see at once from the poem that the world is even farther from understanding the deep sincerity of the Pope; while it sees Caponsacchi and Pompilia in a rosy sentimental light and weeps over them, quite unaware of the great and glorious victory human love has gained in both, blind alike to their triumph and the price they have paid for it. All this the world's coarse thumb and finger failed to plumb, all this men ignored in them, all this they were worth to God, and why not also to us?

¹ B. and R. 835-40.

